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May 2010

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THE world's star players will, inevitably, get top billing over the next few months in the myriad World Cup guides that will hit the newstands.

There's very little *World Soccer* can add to the collective knowledge on the likes of Messi, Rooney and Kaka. So in this issue (page 60) we turn the spotlight on the lesser lights of the World Cup – the secret weapons, relative unknowns and surprise packages who could make all the difference in South Africa in a few weeks time.

We're not trying to unearth 2010's Toto Schillaci, but merely highlight the players who will be overlooked by the glory hunters.

Sadly, international tournaments tend to be won by the squads with the deepest mental strength, not outstanding individual ability. The World Cup is no different.

Argentina, with Diego Maradona in 1986, were an exception to a rule that was confirmed by Italy in Germany four years ago. Maradona's successor, Lionel Messi, may yet be the outstanding performer in South Africa, but the fear persists – as Paul Gardner argues on page 12 – that he will be out-muscled by lesser teams.

Deadlines made it difficult for us to report on the knockout stages of the Champions League this month. We will return to that competition in earnest in the June issue. Meantime, all our thoughts are with the World Cup.

Next month's issue will be a special collector's edition dedicated to the 2010 finals with detailed analysis of every team.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com

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ANOTHER FINE MESS

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...IN PICTURES

The global game caught on camera

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Swing when you're winning... Daniele De Rossi celebrates after Luca Toni's goal gave Roma a 2-1 victory in their top of the table clash against Internazionale

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Feeling the heat...Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini (left) clashes with Everton boss David Moyes

Take cover...Marseille (in white) and Bordeaux dispute the French League Cup Final

Jump to it...Takuro Yajima of Kawasaki Frontale (right) competes with Mitsuru Nagata of Albirex Niigata

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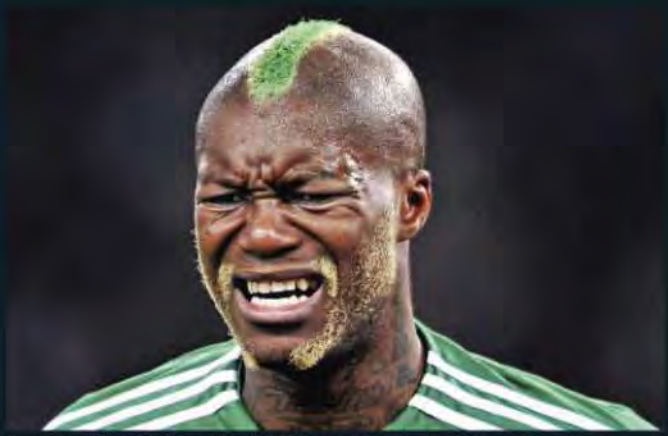
Defensive wall...Bursaspor players come under attack from Diyarbakirspor fans in Turkey



Green day...Panathinaikos striker Djibril Cisse sports a new hairstyle

Power shower...La Bombonera stadium in Buenos Aires is covered with blue and yellow ticker tape before Boca Juniors' local derby with River Plate

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Brian Glanville

...on Jose Mourinho, the new Herrera... farewell to David Beckham...Ian Watmore's exit from the Football Association

Collision course...Mourinho (left) and Ancelotti look on as Zhirkov (18) and Eto'o tangle in the Champions League

AFTER INTERNAZIONALE had beaten Chelsea at Stamford Bridge there was much lavish eulogy for the English side's former manager, Jose Mourinho, and his tactics. Which, broadly speaking, consisted of using two strikers, Goran Pandev and Samuel Eto'o, wide on the wings and thereby limiting the overlapping opportunities of the Chelsea full-backs, Branislav Ivanovic – whose fine run had brought a goal at San Siro – and Yuri Zhirkov.

Had Ashley Cole, rather than Russia's Zhirkov, been playing at left-back, however, I doubt if Inter could so easily have contained him.

What seemed to be ignored is the fact that Chelsea, in the first half, should certainly have had a penalty – when Walter Samuel hauled down Didier Drogba – and that had they scored from it, it would have been a very different game, with Inter obliged to run more risks. It is also worth recording that not only did Chelsea lack Ashley Cole, they were also without the influential Michael Essien.

Curiously careless in defence, Chelsea might well have given away a couple of other goals; the winner from Eto'o coming from a manifest defensive breakdown that enabled him to run at will through a square rearguard onto Wesley Sneijder's typically shrewd ball.

> "Abramovich made what was surely a crucial mistake in firing Mourinho"

Inter's victory at Stamford Bridge, and their previous win at San Siro, came in the midst of a surprisingly patchy run in the *Campionato*. Brazil's centre-back Lucio, a dominant figure in the game at Chelsea, had, a few days previously, looked vulnerable in a disastrous game against modest Catania, where Inter lost 3-1 and Sulley Muntari was sent off.

For Carlo Ancelotti, Chelsea's defeat by Manchester City at home was catastrophic and the Inter loss was followed by an uneasy draw at Blackburn Rovers. Patience is hardly a defining feature of Roman Abramovich's character, as we saw when he made what was surely a crucial mistake in firing Mourinho. Guus Hiddink apart – and he couldn't stay for long – no Chelsea manager has done remotely as well.

The writing was on the wall for Mourinho at Chelsea when Aston Villa scored their second goal in a 2-0 victory at Villa Park in September 2007 and Abramovich swept out of the directors' box. But there had previously been tension over the absurd purchase of a fading Andriy Shevchenko, plainly at the instigation of Abramovich, at a cost of £30million and a huge salary.

Mourinho is beyond doubt a remarkable manager who, like Arrigo Sacchi, came out of nowhere. Sacchi, who wasn't even considered good enough to play for his local amateur team, was wont to say pithily "you didn't have to be a horse to be a jockey". Yet he won titles with Milan and coached Italy, however controversially, in the 1994 World Cup.

That Mourinho is arrogant, a very poor loser and a flamboyant exhibitionist is also beyond doubt. But so, still more radically, was one of his Inter predecessors, Helenio Herrera. Mourinho's behaviour when Chelsea played and lost a European game in Barcelona was outrageous as he quite wrongly accused his opposite number, Frank Rijkaard, of going into the referee's room at half-time.

When it came to the return at Stamford Bridge, Eto'o, then a Barcelona man, has testified that Mourinho behaved with wild abandon – and that's not to mention his ridiculous, prolonged lamentation after Chelsea had lost a European Cup game at Anfield, when he insisted, against the clear enough evidence, that a Liverpool goal hadn't crossed the line, and, even if it hadn't, a penalty could and would have been given against his goalkeeper, Petr Cech.

Yes, the apt comparison is surely with Herrera.

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AND so, at last, goodbye David Beckham. No one could fail to sympathise with him over his wretchedly painful Achilles tendon injury, yet, to be brutally blunt, at least in its cruel way it puts a temporary end to Fabio Capello's inexplicable bout of "Beckhamitis".

All those farcical so-called cameo appearances which have statistically at least enabled him to overtake Bobby Moore's genuine achievement of 108 caps, which were gained over 90 minutes bar, of course, the 1966 World Cup Final, when he captained England against West Germany for 120 minutes, extra time included.

Capello's far from magnificent obsession with Beckham was made more of a fiasco by the fact that so many splendid young English wingers have lately appeared. Aaron Lennon is probably the fastest and the best of them, although his latest groin injury may exclude him from the World Cup. But that still leaves Theo Walcott, despite Chris Waddle and Ian Wright's somewhat gratuitous criticism – when did Waddle ever get a hat-trick for England, as Walcott did in Croatia? – James Milner, splendid on either flank or in central midfield, and Shaun Wright-Phillips with his pace and control.

Then there is Ashley Young of Aston Villa, another speedster, and Adam Johnson, just sold, expensively, by Middlesbrough to Manchester City, where he has already scored a splendid left-footed curler at Sunderland.

How ironic, in retrospect, to recall that a teenage Walcott, capped just

Agony...Beckham is carried off at San Siro

once but yet to get a first-team game with Arsenal, should have been taken by the ineffable Sven Goran Eriksson to the 2006 World Cup, where he never got on the field, thereby blocking the way to a player who might well have done. That of course, Shaun Wright-Phillips is Ian Wright's adopted son is perhaps relevant, but I'd happily see Wright-Phillips chosen.

DISMISSED by one commentator as "an insignificant civil servant", Ian Watmore has walked out of his job as chief executive of the FA. Readers of these columns will know that I was hardly lost in admiration for a man who, it seemed to me, was yet another outsider – chairman Lord Triesman is arguably also one – brought into senior FA office.

Yet Watmore surely had his valid arguments, not least over the absurd decision to allow another damned rugby match on the sacred, if ever replaceable, Wembley turf shortly before the FA Cup Final and England's friendly against Mexico.

Valid case...Watmore

Watmore also, surely, had a valid case in his anxiety to improve the FA's ever paradoxical disciplinary procedures. Above all, how can the FA function independently and effectively when the enemies are not only at the gates but well inside them?

Among them, Dave Richards – who inexplicably appears to wield power far beyond any obvious capacities – still, inexplicably again, chairman of the Premier League, having abruptly resigned from the 2018 World Cup board last November.

It was previously, and no fault of Watmore, horrible to see the FA grovelling to that emetic, greedy, ever self-regarding figure, Jack Warner of Trinidad and CONCACAF, in the hope of getting his dubious support for England's World Cup bid; an ambition hardly worth attaining if it means selling out so blatantly to a figure who has been ruthlessly exposed in the researches of Andrew Jennings in his book *Foul!* and after.

The sad truth is that the FA haven't had a decent leader since Stanley Rous became FIFA president in 1962. Walter Winterbottom, resigning after 16 years as England team manager, should have succeeded Rous. The ever devious Harold Thompson saw that he didn't, the job going to the feeble Denis Follows, whom Thompson duly drove into a heart attack. Meanwhile, Ted Croker was mediocre and Adam Crozier richly rewarded...but for what? ●

GOALS
WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Cool...Robinho

1 Robinho, Brazil v Republic of Ireland
A move full of intricate passes and coolly finished

2 Rodriguinho, Santo Andre v Palmeiras
Some fine one-touch passing, finished with a backheel

3 Ruben Ramirez, Banfield v Colon
Beats the offside trap and volleys home in mid-air

4 Neymar, Santos v Naviraiense
Skips past three defenders before dummying the keeper and tapping into an empty net

5 Samir Nasri, Arsenal v Porto
Goes past three defenders and scores in off the far post

Exceptional...Nasri

6 Lionel Messi, Barcelona v Real Zaragoza
Beats three defenders and scores in the bottom corner

Trickery...Messi

ONE THAT SHOULD HAVE GONE IN...

I don't believe it...Riviere

Emmanuel Riviere, Saint-Etienne v Lyon
With the Lyon goal at his mercy, the 20-year-old striker missed from four yards out, meaning that Les Verts *had to settle for a 1-1 draw at the Stade de Gerland*

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

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NUMBERS GAME

Ssshh...Blatter won't reveal his salary

$1 billion
revenue for FIFA in 2009, according to the world governing body's latest accounts

£569 million
expenditure by FIFA last year

£129 million
surplus last year

£132,000
to be redistributed by FIFA to each of the 208 national federations.

£2.5 billion
anticipated revenue for FIFA in the 2011-2014 period

£2.37 billion
anticipated expenditure by FIFA in the 2011-2014 period

Unknown
Sepp Blatter's earnings from FIFA in 2009

REPORTS we couldn't make up

SIBLING RIVALRY

Whoever wins the Dutch league title, somebody will be celebrating in the De Jong household, and Twente striker Luuk De Jong currently holds the edge over his elder brother, Ajax midfielder Siem.

The Holland Under-21 internationals, who were born in Switzerland (where their parents played professional volleyball), are not related to Manchester City midfielder Nigel. Both started at De Graafschap, but Siem moved to the Ajax youth academy in 2006, while Luuk stayed at De Graafschap until signing for Twente at the start of this season.

Despite the fierce competition the brothers remain down to earth. "It's funny and we talk about it sometimes. But it is more a subject in the club's dressing room than at home," says Luuk.

Siem adds: "Of course I hope that he is doing well and he is allowed to score.

"But only if Twente lose."

It'll be a De Jong title race...Twente's Luuk (left) and Siem of Ajax

Follower of fashion...Reja copies Mancini (inset)

HAVING A SCARF

Lazio coach Edy Reja has taken to wearing a light-blue-and-white scarf in the style of former club boss Roberto Mancini, now a trendsetter at Manchester City. Are they, by any chance, related?

DRIVING AMBITION

Deportivo La Coruna defender Manuel Pablo drives a taxi in his spare time, following in the footsteps – or is it tyre tracks? – of his father. "You must never forget where you came from," he says.

RUMOURS we'd like to believe

Wanted back home...Deco

Brazil's *O Globo* confidently predicts Chelsea midfielder Deco will be heading for Rio giants Fluminense after the World Cup. Apparently, Flamengo and Corinthians are in the hunt for the Brazil-born Portugal international too.

Hamburg right-back or central defender Jerome Boateng, a Bundesliga and Germany revelation this season, could be on his way to Manchester City. Leading sports magazine *Kicker* reckons the cash-rich Premier League club will happily pay the £12million required to trigger the youngster's release.

In Portugal, *A Bola* has it on good authority that Atletico Madrid are extremely keen on recruiting Benfica's Brazil centre-back Luisao. His contract with the Lisbon club runs out in 2013.

Sources in Lisbon and Turin claim Juventus are to table a bid for the Sporting and Portugal midfielder Miguel Veloso, who has made it clear he is keen to move on.

Border hopping?...Luisao

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Paul Gardner

Who will protect Messi in South Africa?

THERE IS every possibility Lionel Messi will take a mauling at the World Cup. The world's most dangerous player is in terrific goalscoring form and I've heard him referred to on several occasions as "unstoppable". That, however, is obviously not true.

Messi can be stopped by fouling, and the question can therefore be turned over to FIFA and the World Cup referees: how much fouling are you guys going to allow in South Africa or do we have to wait until Messi hobbles or, pray not, is carried off before any action is taken?

Diego Maradona was 21 years old when he played his first World Cup game – the opener of the 1982 tournament in Spain, against Belgium. Take a look at the photo taken during that game. It's pretty funny, no? Maradona poised in front of six anxious looking defenders.

But it wasn't funny. The picture hides the truth about the tactics employed by Belgium. A packed midfield, yes, but also blatant thuggery. Maradona was bumped, barged, blocked, tripped, shoved and hacked throughout the game. The Czechoslovakian referee allowed most of the fouling to go unpunished.

Maradona, four years wiser, got his sweet revenge in 1986 with as dominating a World Cup-performance as any of us is likely to see. It was capped with that superb goal against England, a goal born of Maradona's magical dribbling.

Now, 28 years later, we have another Argentinian genius in Messi. For the first time since 1982 we have a much-heralded and much-feared player with what used to be the signature skill of football: dribbling. However, simply put, will Messi be allowed to use that skill?

What a question to have to ask! But it must be asked because football has taught itself to live with a huge contradiction. Even as Messi, a classic dribbler, is hailed as the world's top player, football now treats dribbling with considerable contempt.

One of the huge distortions that modern technical coaching has heaped on football is the glorification of defensive tactics (which can be coached) and the parallel scorn for individual skills (which cannot be taught). That was evident back in 1982 when the FIFA Technical Report found a way to ignore, even to praise, Belgium's thuggery. In a technical way, of course. Alongside a photo of Maradona being tackled by two Belgians, the caption read: "Individual players on the Argentine side caught in cleverly developed triangular formations of the Belgian defence."

But "individual players" are pesky people and they are still with us. Here comes Messi; can he repeat what Maradona did in 1986 and turn a rather ordinary team into a World Cup winner? He has already done just that at the Under-20 World Cup, when it was his brilliance and goals that inspired Argentina to victory in 2005 and he won both the best player and top scorer awards.

Bad refereeing

Attention must be paid to that 1982 warning. The similarities are too close for comfort, too disturbing for complacency. I have drawn attention to the pitifully bad refereeing in 1982 that permitted the assaults on Maradona. Will the refereeing be any better this time round?

I think so; but not much better. A FIFA pre-tournament directive to the World Cup referees instructing them to use zero-tolerance for vicious tackles might help, but many would see that as giving special protection to Messi. Not so, because any player that dribbles would be protected from such tackling. The problem is that Messi is one of the few who do dribble, so any general clamping down on wild or persistent tackling will give the appearance that it is to benefit him.

He shall not pass...Maradona takes on Belgium in the 1982 World Cup

This is a situation that FIFA, its referees' committee and, particularly, the International Board have allowed to develop because they have simply refused to make the necessary rule changes to ensure that the most skillful of footballers – the dribblers – are not forced out of the game.

Lionel Messi is the shining jewel of football. His small, vulnerable body brings the sport to glittering life in a way that few of today's players can manage. A talent to be cherished; yet one fears for his safety because of primitive attitudes in the very sport that he adorns, a sport that, incredibly, cannot make up its mind whether it wants his precious skills or not. ●

"For the first time since 1982 we have a much-feared and much heralded player...simply put, will Messi be allowed to use his dribbling skill?"

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Jim Holden

FA boss Watmore was no fool

IAN WATMORE didn't become chief executive of the Football Association to enjoy the grand perks of office – the five-star luxury travel around the world, VIP seats at all the big matches, the glamorous celebrity of holding a fancy sporting title.

No, the man who was steeped in the rough and tumble of real politics jumped into the game with the fond ambition of trying to bring some sane governance to the dysfunctional world of English football.

The week he started in the job he declined to join the England team on an away trip for a World Cup qualifier because there was proper work to do at home. But, during his eight months in charge, Watmore didn't sit hidden away in his plush office. Instead, he worked among everyone else, setting up camp for a few weeks at a time in the middle of each FA department so that he could get to know all the staff and how each section operated.

This was a man intent on succeeding where so many had failed in the task of making the FA a relevant ruling body. So it was a major surprise when he quit, leaving the FA to seek a seventh chief executive in 11 years.

Some said that Watmore had shown weakness to walk away from the struggle with the vested interests of the rich and selfish Premier League. They said he had to expect high levels of conflict. Others thought he was wise to go the moment he knew it would be impossible to achieve his significant ambitions, such as a modernisation of the disciplinary system, because of hostility from the Premier League.

Personally, I side with the latter argument.

There was no point Watmore pretending to fight battles with no prospect of victory. And certainly no point in staying to enjoy the perks of a trip to the World Cup when his real job was impossible to conduct.

You only had to listen to a couple of ideas recently floated in the English game to understand the supremely egotistical belief of Premier League folk that they have all the answers and should be in charge of everything.

One was the scheme suggested by Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson – a man with serial poor behaviour on his record, yet for so long treated with kid gloves by a cowed Football Association. He wants a panel set up to rule retrospectively on contentious incidents, run by ex-managers under the auspices of the League Managers' Association, of which Ferguson is an executive committee member.

What is required is exactly the opposite: strong, independent disciplinary judgements provided by a confident FA. That was Watmore's impossible-to-achieve vision.

Going, going...Watmore (right) with the England coach, Fabio Capello

"What is required is strong, independent disciplinary judgements provide by a confident FA. That was Watmore's impossible-to-achieve mission"

The second idea was mooted by Dave Whelan, chairman of Wigan Athletic and a former player who broke a leg in the 1960 FA Cup Final. He said the Premier League should be in charge of running the England team because the professionals know best.

"The game has moved from being a purely amateur game and now it's professional," proclaimed Whelan.

Well, you don't say. England set up its first professional football league in 1888. That's a mere 122 years ago. Glad you caught up with that development, Mr Whelan.

What would happen is clear enough. There would be no friendlies for England because they would get in the way of Premier League business. Worse still, decisions on the national team would be taken by the Premier League power-brokers – owners like Whelan, who would be one of the more acceptable chaps in that situation.

Look at some of the others. Roman Abramovich, who funds Russia's national side? The Glazers, who barely find time to watch Manchester United? Tom Hicks and George Gillet, the reviled American owners of Liverpool?

And who would be responsible for choosing a new England manager? Richard Scudamore, chief executive of the Premier League? A committee of bosses like Ferguson, Arsene Wenger and Carlo Ancelotti, none of them English and all with a club agenda when it comes to internationals?

The truth is the Premier League already wields vast power in English football, far too much, and refuses to yield an inch of territory gained.

Watmore foundered on this reality. So did his predecessors and so will his successor. No single man can make the change for better occur.

Every sport in every country needs an independent governing body that can rule over the vested interests of clubs, leagues and organisations. This is obvious in terms of matters like discipline, a coherent national strategy for coaching and development, the provision of grass roots facilities as well as the running of the national teams at every level.

That English football can't make this happen is a national scandal. ●

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HEROES...

On top again...Magath

FELIX MAGATH
On top of the Bundesliga and on course for his second title in successive seasons with two different clubs: Wolfsburg and now Schalke.

Long wait...Marseille

MARSEILLE
Won their first trophy since the 1993 European Cup by beating Bordeaux 3-1 in the French League Cup Final.

CLINT DEMPSEY
The American midfielder, not long back from serious injury, scored a terrific winning goal for Roy Hodgson's Fulham to dump Juventus out of the Europa League.

Winner...Dempsey

DAVID JAMES
The goalkeeper organised a whip-round among the Portsmouth players to pay the wages and save the jobs of five backroom staff at the cash-strapped Premier League club.

SAMUEL ETO'O
The Cameroon striker struck the only goal of the Champions League second round, second-leg tie at Stamford Bridge as Internazionale put Chelsea out of the Champions League.

WEST BROMWICH ALBION
Without a shirt sponsor, they have worn shirts for two live televised matches (v Newcastle United and Sheffield Wednesday) with appeals for the Haiti disaster and the Chile earthquake. The shirts were auctioned off after the games.

Good cause...West Brom

& VILLAINS

HOSSAM GHALY
The former Tottenham Hotspur player, now with Saudi club Al Nasr, faces a year ban after testing positive for a banned substance while playing in a cup tie against Al Hilal.

Bela...the "Hound of God"

SANDRO ROSELL
The Barcelona presidential candidate has threatened to put sponsorship on the club's shirts next season.

BELA THE DOG
Argentina coach Diego Maradona underwent reconstructive surgery on his upper lip in a Buenos Aires clinic after being bitten by his pet pooch.

SAN LUCA
Sixteen players from the Italian amateur side were suspended for two games after wearing black armbands to mourn the death of Mafia boss Antonio Pelle, who was related to a member of the club. The team, who play in the eighth tier, were docked three points and fined £500.

Stroppy...Miralles

EZEQUIEL MIRALLES
The 26-year-old Colo Colo striker demanded that he was substituted, then stormed out of the ground and went off home in a huff, after his side's captain, Arturo Sanhueza, refused to let him take a penalty in a Chilean league game against La Serena.

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HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Lionel Messi

More plaudits for the world's best player

SPAIN

CURRENTLY the game's greatest attraction, Lionel Messi has claimed yet another prime position after being named top of a players' "rich list".

Barcelona's Argentinian earned £29.7million last year, putting him ahead of the previous year's top-earner David Beckham (£27.3m) with Cristiano Ronaldo (£27m) in third.

The list, published in Paris weekly *France Football*, estimates Messi's annual earnings based on a basic salary of £9.1m, plus £3.6m in bonuses and an annual £17m from personal sponsors including Adidas, Pepsi-Cola, Gillette, Gatorade, Konami, Air Europa, Telefonica/Movistar, SportCenter/ESPN, Damm, Danone, Lody For Men, Storkman, Repsol YPF, SanDisk and Mirage/Seiko.

Messi has been in imperious form in recent weeks, scoring back-to-back hat-tricks in the Spanish league against Valencia and Zaragoza, as Barcelona seek to retain last season's double haul of the Spanish league and Champions League.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta even claimed: "He is the best player in the world and in the history of football. Along with Johan Cruyff and Diego Maradona he is the best we have ever seen here. He played a great game, he's a brilliant footballer, decisive in matches and plays for the team. He is Barcelona's leader."

Messi's outstanding hat-trick against Zaragoza was his third of the season and earned rare praise from Cruyff, who said: "It's impossible to put a price on his greatness, not only for the way he takes responsibility on behalf of the team but because of his generosity of spirit."

Another man to place Messi above Maradona was Deportivo La Coruna's Argentinian coach Miguel Angel Lotina, who added: "For me, Messi is an even more complete footballer than Maradona because he is quicker and a better team player."

Messi has scored 114 goals in 199 games for Barcelona in all competitions since making his debut in 2004-05.

That compares impressively, considering the physical demands of the modern game, with the first five-year marksmanship rates of other superstars. Alfredo Di Stefano scored 97 goals in 134 games for San Lorenzo, River Plate and Millonarios between 1945 and 1950; Pele ramped up 202 goals in 257 appearances for Santos between 1957 and 1961; Cruyff scored 164 goals in 202 for Ajax between 1964 and 1970; and Maradona claimed 144 goals in 206 games between 1976 and 1981 for Argentinos Juniors and Boca Juniors.

Comparisons between eras are highly problematic and Messi might, privately, take greatest pride in the assessment of Pep Guardiola, his Barcelona coach, who has said: "Messi is the greatest footballer I have ever seen...or expect ever to see."

Keir Radnedge

That's rich...Messi's earnings last year topped those of any other footballer

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Great expectations...Jordaan

Danny Jordaan
World Cup boss preparing for final reckoning

SOUTH AFRICA

THE FOCUS of the chief executive of South Africa's historic first World Cup is changing. Having spent much of the past six years defending the award of the finals, Danny Jordaan can now talk more about what he expects will happen, rather than what other people fear.

He accepts that the criticism had been inevitable, recalling: "Athens had a terrible time before the 2004 Olympics and months before the 2006 World Cup in Germany a group came out with a study which claimed four of the stadia were unsafe and created a panic.

"As an event organiser you brace yourself, knowing that your friends in the media will question everything. If you don't want to be questioned, find some other job. Sometimes you can see them walk away and you think: 'They're not convinced.' That's life."

But those days are becoming fewer for Jordaan with the realisation of the imminence of the finals. He says: "We've been talking for so long about the World Cup coming to South Africa and now, at last, it's a reality; not something we're dreaming about that one day should happen in our country.

"It's not only about football. We've just celebrated 20 years since Nelson Mandela's walk out of prison and this is another big step along that path and a tremendous test for the country."

Reviewing the wider issues, Jordaan has no doubt about the public relations power of sport in general, and football in particular, on the worldwide stage.

He says: "Right back in 1994, when we first started talking about the World Cup, we believed that it would help improve our infrastructure and our image internationally.

"Only sport can do this. What can I organise to bring 400 television crews into my country, to bring 15,000 journalists into my country? What else can I do to bring 350,000 foreign visitors into my country?

"Of course, each one will form his or her own opinion. But every day 15,000 articles are being written about the country; every day there are 400 international broadcasts over 30 days. All this can change perceptions.

"What else is there to use if not a major event like a World Cup? I can tell you: it's not been created yet."

The one snag over which Jordaan has no influence is Bafana Bafana. Every host nation needs its team to go as far as possible – at least beyond the group stage – to invest the tournament with homeland momentum.

This is a serious challenge for South Africa, which may be one reason why Jordaan is hoping to see some strong performances from all the other African teams.

Then, on July 12, Jordaan will be out of a job for the first time in a decade. He has mixed feelings and admits: "I'm happy to see the end of a road, of a dream, of a struggle, a pursuit, but I am beginning to realise there is a life beyond July 11 and I need to discuss the next steps.

"From South Africa, where am I going next?"

Keir Radnedge

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Striking a balance...Drogba was not in Ghana to receive his award, which was accepted on his behalf by Ivory Coast FA president Jacques Anouma (inset right)

Didier Drogba
Surprise as Chelsea striker claims continent's player of the year award

AFRICA

DIDIER DROGBA was named the 2009 African footballer of the year. If the award – his second in four years – was a surprise, even more so was the margin of his triumph in the poll as he beat Samuel Eto'o by 23 points.

The pair have been embroiled in some tight contests in the past and it was expected to be fairly close again this time, albeit with Eto'o the seemingly logical winner.

Instead, coaches from more than 40 countries voted for the charisma of the Chelsea man rather than the more impressive achievements of Eto'o over a calendar year in which he became a UEFA Champions League winner for a second time and helped take Cameroon to the World Cup finals.

Michael Essien finished third – the fourth year in a row he has made the shortlist of three finalists but come up empty-handed.

The award was made at the Confederation of African Football's annual soiree, at State House in Accra, Ghana, though no stars bothered to attend. Algeria were named team of the year, after eliminating Egypt in the World Cup qualifiers, and Sellas Tetteh, who led Ghana's Under-20 side to the World Championship in Egypt, was coach of the year.

Drogba had the good grace to express his genuine surprise at winning the award and must be feeling somewhat sheepish, given the most memorable act of his footballing year was the histrionics that followed Chelsea's elimination by Barcelona in the UEFA Champions League.

At international level, both he and Eto'o scored key goals as their countries completed successful World Cup qualification campaigns.

Drogba netted the goal that ensured Ivory Coast went through with games to spare and entrenched his leadership role, while Eto'o scored eight goals in the qualifiers and also wore the captain's armband, though his appointment came in mid-year in a strategic move by new coach Paul Le Guen to breath some fire back into a stagnating Indomitable Lions.

Eto'o took on the mantle with fervour and rallied the side from bottom of their group to see them also qualify in the end with some ease.

At club level, Drogba was devastating at times for Chelsea and the fact he was regarded as the world's best striker sat comfortably on his head – even if his collection of medals was on the sparse side.

His only success came in the FA Cup Final against Everton, where he scored at Wembley, but the league race saw Chelsea edged by Manchester United and in the Champions League – the trophy the Blues really wanted – there was a controversial semi-final elimination.

For Eto'o, there was much to savour, despite a summer swap from Spain to Serie A with Internazionale. The high point was the Champions League Final and a goal in Barcelona's 2-0 win over Manchester United in Rome. Eto'o also won La Liga with Barca, passing the landmark of 100 goals for the club during the year.

Yet the African prize went in the other direction, adding another damaging blow to the prestige of an award CAF have managed to tarnish in recent years.

Mark Gleeson

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Quevilly
Part-timers plot French Cup upset

FRANCE

THE magic of the cup still lives on in France. The amateurs of US Quevilly – currently sitting in fifth place in Group D of the CFA, the country's four-league fourth division – are in the semi-finals of the French Cup, where they will meet the giants of Paris Saint-Germain for a place in the Final.

It's been an incredible journey for coach Regis Brouard's side from Normandy. In nine rounds of the competition so far, they have knocked out one side from the second division (Angers) and two from the top flight.

Rennes were sent packing 1-0 in the club's eighth game of the campaign. Then, in the quarter-finals, Boulogne were put to the sword 3-1 in front of 10,000 delirious fans at the Robert Diochon stadium, the borrowed home of Quevilly's somewhat more illustrious neighbours Rouen.

Most amazing of all, perhaps, is the fact that Damien Marcq's goal for Boulogne was the first Quevilly had conceded in the cup run.

France is gripped by Quevilly fever as they attempt to make it all the way to the Final and the club can even count Franck Ribery among its new fans. The Bayern Munich and France superstar is friends with Quevilly defender Cedric Vanoukia, who played with him at Brest in 2004. Ribery has been in regular touch since the win over Rennes.

"Franck invited my wife and I to the recent France-Spain match and I caught up with him after the game," said Vanoukia. "He told me how pleased he was for me."

Nobody could have expected Quevilly to have performed such giant-killing heroics, of course. But the club have a proud cup history, nonetheless. They have twice been semi-finalists before, in 1942 and 1968, and even made it all the way to the Final back in 1927, when they went down 3-0 to the aristocrats of Marseille.

Brouard was given a book outlining the club's illustrious cup history when he first arrived at Quevilly and was more than aware that he was expected to uphold the tradition. Well, he's done that and more!

With just one match against the highly unpredictable PSG standing between Quevilly and a trip to the Stade de France on May 1, who would bet against the men in yellow upsetting the odds yet again and creating an even greater piece of French football history?

Howard Johnson

Bring on PSG...Quevilly celebrate victory over Boulogne

Park Ji-sung
United's South Korean midfielder in the spotlight

ENGLAND

In where it hurts...Park ignores Glen Johnson's flailing boot to head United's winner against Liverpool

IN the headlong rush of the English media to anoint Wayne Rooney as the leading candidate for the end-of-season player awards, the role of a lesser-known Manchester United player has been overlooked.

Park Ji-sung's winning goal in United's 2-1 league victory over Liverpool confirmed his reputation as one of the unsung heroes at Old Trafford. It also prompted Alex Ferguson to assert the South Korean's importance to the team and deny he was signed because of his commercial value

"I didn't think that," says Ferguson. "When I went to see him play in the Champions League semi-finals for PSV Eindhoven in 2005, I thought, 'this is a player who understands football'.

"He is intelligent and disciplined and he can play different positions. I had no issues about anything else at all."

Park remains a shy, retiring figure off the pitch. Despite being a single man, he shuns the bright lights of Manchester for a quieter life in Cheshire's millionaire belt.

His media profile may be low in the UK but he is one of United's highest earners thanks to a string of commercial deals back home. He has long been seen as Asia's brightest footballing talent; this season, Europe has woken up to his talent.

John Holmesdale

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Keir Radnedge

Platini's pledges

The UEFA boss opts for four more years at UEFA...

WILL HE or won't he? Answer: he won't and he will. The "he" in this happy political puzzle is Michel Platini, who will stand again for the presidency of UEFA – and that has given him a convincing reason why he will not be standing against Sepp Blatter, also next year, for the leadership of FIFA.

The timeline for settling the identities of the two men who will lead the European and world game between 2011 and 2015 is clear, with UEFA voting first in May next year, followed by FIFA.

To start with FIFA. Until the latter stages of last year it had appeared likely that Blatter, in power since 1998, would not be opposed. Then Asian confederation president Mohamed Bin Hammam (Blatter's backer in 1998) complained in public that Blatter had outstayed his welcome. Bin Hammam even suggested FIFA presidents serve a maximum of two terms, a move that was defeated by 15 votes to five with one abstention. No surprise that the vote was lost; instead the surprise was that Bin Hammam felt emboldened enough to take it to the table.

> **At least nowadays no one describes me as the man who takes free-kicks**
>
> *Former France international Platini*

Bin Hammam nearly lost his seat in Asian elections last year and has moved to heal a rift with the Far East by forming an alliance with South Korea's Chung Mong-joon, once a bitter critic. Neither can command majority support throughout the world – indeed, neither can command unanimity within Asia – and they considered trying to persuade Platini to run against Blatter.

This was one of the considerations in Platini's mind as he approached UEFA's recent congress in Tel Aviv; one other consideration was whether he wanted to shoulder the responsibility for a further four years.

Pet projects

In the event, Platini decided that his pet projects within the European game were not far enough progressed for him to step out. Hence the need to maintain working momentum on financial fair play, the anti-corruption drive, returning power to the middle nations, goal-line assistants and outlawing the transfer of minors.

Platini, 54, who became UEFA's sixth president when he ousted Sweden's veteran Lennart Johansson in 2007, told congress: "I am a happy man, a happy president and happy to work with you. There is more work to do so I am happy to announce to you that I am a candidate for re-election.

"Many people have asked me, will I stay at UEFA, will I go to FIFA, will I go to Juventus, will I be a senator, or become a member of parliament?

"Now I have a year to prepare my programme for the next four years. At least nowadays no one describes me as the man who takes free-kicks."

Blatter, as he freely acknowledges, does not see eye-to-eye with Platini on everything. One area of dispute is how best to circumvent European Union employment law as it affects club use of foreign players. FIFA wants to use the Treaty of Lisbon lever to impose six-and-five, while UEFA believes in the more subtle imposition of home-grown players in a registered squad.

Otherwise FIFA and UEFA now work together on governance issues more closely than at any time in their history. That happy arrangement will continue now Blatter has confirmation that Platini is no threat.

Of course, Platini may stand for FIFA president in 2015. He would be around the right age, at 59, but the 24/7 demand of the FIFA job would surely not appeal. In any case, Bin Hammam and Chung might have found a new candidate by then – assuming there isn't a two-term rule for executive members by then.

Happy where he is...Platini

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Grounds for concern...building work continues on Ukrainian stadiums in Kiev (top) and Lviv

...and sticks with Poland/Ukraine

IT is impossible to believe that Platini, if he had not been wedded to a philosophy of backing the middle ground, would still be taking the Euro 2012 finals to Poland and Ukraine.

His desperation for the embattled partners to get their infrastructural act together – the Ukrainians above all – boiled over in his frustrated urging of federation presidents Grzegorz Lato and Grigoriy Surkis "not to take your foot of the pedal".

Platini told them: "Mr Surkis, Mr Lato it is imperative that you steer a steady course as you approach the final straight. I believe in you, we believe in you. Remember in only 27 months the eyes of the whole world will be on you. Step up your efforts."

Platini's cause for concern was underlined by an interview in which project director Martin Kallen said the co-hosts needed to "get into a new gear" and complained that, in Ukraine, and despite all UEFA's kicking, work had been "delayed, delayed, delayed".

Scheduled host cities are Warsaw, Poznan, Wroclaw and Gdansk in Poland, and Kiev, Donetsk, Lviv and Kharkiv in Ukraine. But even Kallen has conceded that, if needs must, the finals could be staged in six venues.

Kallen says: "Playing the tournament in six venues rather than eight is possible but is not a consideration for us at the moment."

Political infighting

Kiev's Olympic Stadium, due to host the final on July 1, 2012, has problems with construction of the roof and seating, while the Lviv stadium is still a building site. In the meantime, UEFA will decide shortly between Italy, France and Turkey for Euro 2016 after some grubby political infighting which saw Germany's Wolfgang Niersbach forced off the advisory commission over Italian worries that previous tournament horse-trading meant he might have a French bias.

France remains favourite. The more snags emerge in Poland and Ukraine the more awkward the persuasive challenge for the Turks who have (mirroring the eastern pair) never hosted the Euro finals. ●

FIFA's gamble with the game's credibility

SEPP BLATTER is rattled; that is the only possible explanation for his decision to publish a long statement on the world federation's website trying to justify what is ever more clearly unjustifiable.

This is the issue of goal-line technology, the importance of which hardly needs further explanation. Suffice to say that a significant weight of opinion within world football came down on Blatter's head last month when the law-making International Board decided to halt the two ongoing experiments.

Two rival companies have been seeking, over the past four years, to impress the board, which is made up four representatives and one each from the original associations of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Any change in the laws of the game needs at least six votes in favour and goal-line technology fell at the voting hurdle. Neither system is perfect but it was on the philosophy of technology that the argument was lost.

Blatter and co will put their faith now in the experiment with "goal judges" placed at either end of the pitch, as is currently being tested in the Europa League.

Blatter points to the need for "universality", which means that "the game must be played in the same way no matter where you are in the world. If you are coaching a group of teenagers in any small town around the world, they will be playing with the same rules as the professional players they see on TV".

This argument was exploded long ago by tennis, which has not been compromised through using Hawk-Eye for service judgments in the major tournaments.

Secondly Blatter points up "the human aspect". Why take a central decision away from the referee? But the referee must still initiate the act of seeking video opinion. He also throws up spurious, even laughable, arguments about cost and the importance of fan debate.

Blatter's real fear is revealed at the end of his diatribe: that approving goal-line technology would open the way to video review of other incidents out on the pitch.

Maybe, maybe not, but in this high-tech age football should be leading the way not lagging behind.

Goal judges...as seen in the Europa League

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30 World Cup

Joel AGUILAR
El Salvador, 02.07.75
Teacher

Khalil AL GHAMDI
Saudi Arabia, 02.09.70
Teacher

Carlos AMARILLA
Paraguay, 26.10.70
Electrical engineer
1 previous World Cup (2006)

Benito ARCHUNDIA
Mexico, 21.03.66
Lawyer
1 previous World Cup (2006)

Hector BALDASSI
Argentina, 05.01.66
Businessman

Jerome DAMON
South Africa, 04.04.72
Teacher

Frank DE BLEECKERE
Belgium, 01.07.66
Public relations manager
1 previous World Cup (2006)

Martin HANSSON
Sweden, 06.04.71
Fireman

Michael HESTER
New Zealand, 02.05.72
Naval officer

Ravshan IRMATOV
Uzbekistan, 09.08.77
Coach at a football school

Yuichi NISHIMURA
Japan, 17.04.72
Full-time referee

Peter O'LEARY
New Zealand, 03.03.72
Teacher

Pablo POZO
Chile, 27.03.73
Auditor

Marco RODRIGUEZ
Mexico, 10.11.73
Teacher
1 previous World Cup (2006)

Roberto ROSETTI
Italy, 18.09.67
Physiotherapist
1 previous World Cup (2006)

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referees

The officials selected by FIFA to officiate at this summer's tournament in South Africa

Carlos BATRES
Guatemala, 02.04.68
Occupation not known
1 previous World Cup (2002)

Mohamed BENOUZA
Algeria, 26.09.72
Businessman

Olegario BENQUERENCA
Portugal, 18.10.69
Insurance agent

Massimo BUSACCA
Switzerland, 06.02.69
Businessman
1 previous World Cup (2006)

Koman COULIBALY
Mali, 04.07.70
Financial inspector

Viktor KASSAI
Hungary, 10.09.75
Travel agent

Stephane LANNOY
France, 18.09.69
Retail

Jorge LARRIONDA
Uruguay, 09.03.68
Clerk
1 previous World Cup (2006)

Eddy MAILLET
Seychelles, 19.10.67
Full-time referees' co-ordinator

Subkhiddin MOHD SALLEH
Malaysia, 17.11.66
Teacher

Oscar RUIZ
Colombia, 01.11.69
Lawyer
2 previous World Cups (2002 and 2006)

Carlos Eugenio SIMON
Brazil, 03.09.65
Journalist
2 previous World Cups (2002 and 2006)

Wolfgang STARK
Germany, 20.11.69
Bank employee

Alberto UNDIANO
Spain, 08.10.73
Sociologist

Howard WEBB
England, 14.07.71
Police officer

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Green and gold revolution

A remarkable alliance of Manchester United fans and businessmen could yet unseat the Glazer family

ENGLAND

DAVID CONN in Manchester

OF ALL THE extraordinary aspects to Manchester United supporters' green and gold campaign, in alliance with the "Red Knight" financiers planning to buy the club from the Florida-based Glazer family, the most striking is how widespread the outpouring has become. The idea for fans to wear green and gold, the colours of Newton Heath, the original club formed in 1878 by workers on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, was initially suggested by a fan on a messageboard.

His was just one small voice in the enormous outcry which followed the January publication of the Glazers' prospectus for United to borrow £500million. It was the second time since they bought United in 2005 that the mountainous debt, which their own takeover imposed on the club, has been refinanced.

Strictly speaking, some of what the Glazers set out in that prospectus was not new – but the power was in it all being published together and the fact that the Glazers themselves had to set it all out. It had been known since 2005 that the family's takeover was a "leveraged buyout"– meaning they borrowed most of the money to buy United, with £275m of the £559m coming from hedge funds at steepling rates of interest – making the club responsible for paying off the debt.

The price of everything at 76,000-seat Old Trafford has increased and, since 2005, United's ticket prices have gone up by between 45 and 63 per cent.

The interest charged to United, together with professional fees and other payments, has been unprecedented – and all of it to pay for a takeover nobody at the club wanted.

The Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) campaigned hard against it, warning that the Glazers

Showing their true colours...supporters have adopted the green and gold of formative club Newton Heath to display their anger

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were only interested in making money for themselves and were bringing only debt to the club. The Independent Manchester United Supporters Association fought bitterly too, and many of their members formed a new supporter-owned club, FC United.

Even directors, who included David Gill – the chief executive who now works for the Glazers – issued a statement opposing the takeover, arguing that the business plan was "aggressive" and "contains more leverage than the board would consider prudent, and that as a consequence there is likely to be significant financial strain on the business".

After the prospectus was launched, Gill defended it for the Glazers – the family members themselves, including the five sons and one daughter of Malcolm Glazer, never speak publicly. Gill argued that the takeover had become acceptable because the structure had changed in ways he did not explain, and he said the finances are sustainable and United could service the debts, despite the interest having pushed United into losses – £44.8m in 2007-08, for example.

> "The price of everything at Old Trafford has increased"

The prospectus did expose a fuller picture, revealing that in 2008-09, United – who were Premier League champions for the third time and Champions League Finalists – had earned a record £278m, but that the interest payable, £67m, would have pushed them into another loss had it not been for the £81m sale of Cristiano Ronaldo to Real Madrid.

The total fees incurred in the original takeover and refinancings

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since, plus £35m which the prospectus revealed United lost in debt-hedging arrangements, added up to a total of £120m having left the club since 2005. The total interest – some, on the bulk of the borrowings, actually paid out by the club; the rest, on what is £200m of hedge fund debts, "rolled up" and accumulating – amounted to £344m.

So, altogether, the takeover by the Glazer family, described as billionaires when they arrived, has cost United £464m in four years.

A shocking picture

"It is staggering, a shocking picture," laments Nick Towle, chair of MUST. "So much money has gone out of the club – which could have been used to keep ticket prices affordable or invested in the team – purely to pay for this family's ownership of the club."

Page 82 of the 322-page prospectus, which further sparked the Old Trafford counter-revolution, was short but direct: Glazer family companies had, since July 1, 2006, been paid £10m in management fees. There was also an agreement to pay a further maximum £2.9m consultancy fee to a family company, and the six Glazer siblings, all directors, had personally borrowed £1.66m each – a total of £10m – from the club. For billionaires, this is unusual practice.

The purpose of the bond issue could be picked out from the small print; it was to release £70m so that the Glazers could pay off some of the prodigiously expensive hedge fund debt. That therefore steamrollered the contention, made by Alex Ferguson repeatedly, that the money from selling Ronaldo was there for him to spend if he wanted to.

The prospectus gave the Glazers the right to take almost £130m out of United immediately.

Fans latched onto the green and gold idea in huge, wildfire numbers, claiming it as a uniform of protest, of adherence to the original collective values of a working-class club and a celebration of United itself. MUST invited people to register their names when logging on to the website and within weeks they had 160,000 members.

> **"So much money has gone out of the club purely to pay for the Glazers ownership of the club"**
>
> *MUST chair, Nick Towle*

Protest...fans let their feelings be known at Old Trafford

Then the Red Knights gathered; rich men of finance, United fans, some with unfinished business, having in the case of Jim O'Neill – who is chief economist at Goldman Sachs – been on the United board when it failed to stop the Glazer takeover. They talked of a part-philanthropic takeover in which around 70 wealthy individuals would buy the club from the Glazers, for a small personal return, and reserve a 25 per cent stake for MUST to hold democratically.

The idea of supporter ownership had finally punched through to mainstream thinking, with years of profiteering takeovers having taken their toll. At the end of March, the government revealed it was planning an election pledge to require all clubs to provide 25 per cent stakes to fans' mutual bodies. O'Neill and his associates seemed motivated by that ideal, seeing football clubs as social bodies of belonging, not companies that were there for financial exploitation, and they seemed partly to be salving their consciences about what their day jobs involve.

Much remained to be done, with one question in particular asked from the beginning: with Manchester United, despite the fans' protests, raining cash and promising more in the future, why would the Glazers sell when their only other apparent businesses are the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' NFL franchise and a recession-vulnerable shopping mall real estate company?

That raised the further question of tactics and whether the supporters, led by MUST, would be prepared to use the one lever which could really rattle the Glazers: refusing, in sufficient numbers, to hand their money over.

In tandem with a substantial Red Knights offer, that could yet work.

However, whether it does or not, a green and gold phenomenon has appeared to wash away English football's complacency that clubs are commercial businesses which should be open to takeovers from anywhere.

For the first time since 1992, when Manchester United first realised the game's growing earning potential, it feels as though a real change is in the air. ●

United...Gill (left) and Malcolm Glazer's son, Avram

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On song in Enschede

Former England coach Steve McClaren has taken Twente to the brink of their first league title

HOLLAND

KLASS-JAN DROPPERT in The Hague

FOR A LONG time, Twente's club song, "One day we will be champions", seemed an absurd and unrealistic theme. Now, 36 years after it was recorded, that sentiment looks set to be realised.

The Enschede club were top of the table with five games to go, four points clear of Ajax and with PSV five behind.

After AZ clinched the title last year, the Dutch league could have another unexpected champion, but Twente have much more solid foundations than the club from Alkmaar.

AZ, who depended mainly on the financial backing of Dirk Scheringa, couldn't survive when the chairman's DSB Bank and insurance holdings collapsed amid the credit crunch and the club are now in administration.

Twente, on the other hand, have many different sponsors and chairman Joop Munsterman, who is chief executive of Holland's biggest print-media company, Wegener, hasn't put any private money into the club.

On the pitch, the big difference is that at AZ Ronald Koeman undid much of the good work of Bayern Munich-bound Louis Van Gaal. At Twente, however, Steve McClaren has continued where Fred Rutten left off.

Twente's success has revived memories of the 1970s when the club, formed by a merger of Enschedese Boys and Sportclub Enschede in 1965, reached the 1975 UEFA Cup Final and won the 1977 Dutch Cup.

After a fallow period, which included relegation in 1983, Twente are back. It started three seasons ago when Rutten built a team around Ismail Aissati, Otman Bakkal (both on loan from PSV) and Orlando Engelaar. They finished runners-up but nobody thought the success would continue, especially when Rutten and Engelaar joined Schalke, and Aissati and Bakkal returned to Eindhoven.

But Munsterman pulled off a masterstroke. After a failed attempt to hire Frank Rijkaard, he turned his attention to McClaren. A return to a Premier League club would have been most unlikely for the man who was made the scapegoat for England's failure to qualify for the Euro 2008 finals so the Yorkshireman was looking for a job abroad. After a chat with Bobby Robson, who coached PSV twice, he decided to give it a go.

Successful...McClaren

> "McClaren has played a major role in transforming the team's mentality. He has given inexperienced players the confidence to perform at the highest level"

McClaren began brightly with Twente finishing runners-up, but there were doubts he could repeat the success after wingers Eljero Elia and Marko Arnautovic left for Hamburg and Internazionale respectively.

But Twente have done even better. While last year they couldn't cope with playing twice a week, losing valuable points after returning from midweek European duties, now they are winning even when not playing well.

McClaren, who learned a few tricks as Alex Ferguson's No2 at Manchester United, has played a major role in transforming the team's mentality. He has given inexperienced players the confidence to perform at the highest level and built a solid, attack-minded side who are hard to beat.

With no real stars, the backbone of the team is formed by Brazil-born Douglas, arguably the best defender in the league, Theo Janssen and Bryan Ruiz. Enfant terrible Janssen is playing the best, most disciplined football of his career, despite being banned by the club for two months at the end of last year after smashing his car into a tree in a drink-driving accident which left a passenger in a coma.

Up front, nobody is talking about Elia and Arnautovic any more because Costa Rica winger Ruiz has been a hit since arriving from Gent, with 19 goals to date and numerous assists.

Many believe attacking right-back Ronnie Stam is due an international call-up. Industrious midfielder Wout Brama has already won a cap, while Kenneth Perez, after failures at Ajax and PSV, is having an Indian summer. Swiss-Congolese striker Blaise Nkufo, who used to wander from club to club but has called Twente home since 2003, has broken Jan Jeuring's club record of 103 goals. And in goal is the reliable Sander Boschker, 39, the sole survivor of the 2001 Dutch Cup win.

Of course, it's only a matter of time before players like Ruiz leave, while Nkufo has already agreed to join Seattle Sounders this summer to finish his career. However, youngsters such as Luuk De Jong, Slovak striker Andrej Rendla and Ghana's Ransford Osei are already knocking on the door.

On the commercial front, the club have ambitious plans to attract new fans. The Grolsch Veste stadium, built in 1998, could be expanded from 24,000 to 42,000 seats if Holland's bid to stage the 2018 or 2022 World Cup is successful.

The future looks bright and if Twente can handle the pressure and write themselves into the history books the club song will need to be rewritten as well.

Declared bankrupt

Elsewhere, it is all over for Haarlem. The club where Ruud Gullit began his career folded in January after being declared bankrupt. Founded in1889, Haarlem were Holland's second-oldest professional club. Champions in 1946, their most recent success came in 1982 when, inspired by 19-year-old Gullit, they finished fourth, straight after promotion from the second division.

Haarlem's 1982 UEFA Cup tie against Spartak Moscow, on a freezing night in the Luzhniki, led to one of Europe's biggest stadium tragedies. With five minutes to go and their side 1-0 up, Spartak fans began to leave, only for news of a second goal to spark a bid to return to the stands. But, with only a few entrances open and the stairs icy, many slipped and were crushed. Official reports spoke of 66 deaths, but other estimates put the total as high as 340.

In 1990 Haarlem were relegated. With little cash and a small fan base, building a new stadium was to have been their lifeline but those plans evaporated amid the credit crunch, leaving them £2million in debt. Not even contributions from Gullit and many other former players could save the club. ●

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New lease of life...Perez (left), evading the attentions of RKC Waalwijk's Derk Boerrigter, is enjoying his best spell in Dutch football with Twente

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State of confusion

The stars may be back, but old problems won't go away

BRAZIL

TIM VICKERY in Rio De Janeiro

THE 2010 VERSION of the Brazilian championship kicks off with the presence of all four national team strikers from the last World Cup: Ronaldo, Adriano, Robinho and Fred. Meanwhile, Roberto Carlos is back from Europe, as are Vagner Love, Ewerthon and Lincoln.

High-profile stars from elsewhere on the continent have also been enticed, including Argentina goalkeeper Roberto Abbondanzieri, Paraguay defender Julio Cesar Caceres and Ecuadorian midfielder Edison Mendez. Add the usual crop of highly promising youngsters, spearheaded by Santos duo Neymar and Paulo Henrique, and this is the strongest cast the national league has assembled for many years.

This is the consequence of two significant developments: the considerable rise in strength of Brazil's currency has made it easier to pay relatively high wages, and the increasing professionalism of marketing departments has brought sponsors on board to share the costs of attracting the stars.

However, it would be wise not to go overboard. As influential Sao Paulo director Marco Aurelio Cunha commented, the return of the big names is "a short-term strategy or an alternative at the end of a career".

There is no slowdown in the trend of youngsters moving across the Atlantic, either. Philippe Coutinho of Vasco da Gama and Fluminense's Wellington Silva, two talented strikers from last year's national under-17 squad, have already been sold and will soon be on their way to Internazionale and Arsenal respectively. In the vast majority of cases, clubs still need to sell to balance the books.

The short-term strategy to which Cunha refers is especially prominent this year, with players struggling for visibility in the run-up to the World Cup. Once that is over, Robinho and Vagner Love are due to return to Europe, where others are sure to join them, while some Brazilians will be repatriated as the global transfer window opens. As a result, teams are torn apart and rebuilt in the middle of the campaign.

We'll meet again...Corinthians' Ronaldo (left) greets Neymar of Santos before a Sao Paulo state championship clash

> **"This is a short-term strategy or an alternative at the end of a career"**
>
> *Sao Paulo director Marco Aurelio Cunha is sceptical at the return of the big names*

Out of sync

The national league has only been staged since 1971, but of the 20 first division teams only six have never won the title. This is due partly to the sheer size of the country and the number of big clubs capable of launching a challenge. But it is also due to a calendar which is out of sync not just with Europe, but the rest of South America.

Quite apart from transfer window disruption, the action gets under way at the exact moment the Libertadores Cup moves into its knockout stage. Clubs inevitably give priority to the continental competition and can then wake up with a hangover to find they are at the wrong end of the league table.

The country's state championships, staged from mid-January to early May, unbalance the calendar. They are vital to the power structure of Brazilian football, but not to the big clubs, who spend months playing feeble opposition in front of tiny crowds.

A growing consensus says the state championships have become a hindrance, with unprecedented criticism in the press this year. But because the national championship has been operated on a league basis only since 2003, few appreciate that, to operate at its potential, a league must be preceded by a pause in the action.

As European leagues are aware, the big kick-off is one of, if not the most, exciting days of the campaign. It is when fans all over the country, starved of real football for a few months, flock to the stadium in the hope that this could be the season when their team springs a surprise. The great advantage of the league system over any play-off format is that its starts hot.

Yet Brazil throws this all away. The state championships come to an end less than a week before the national competition gets under way. Therefore, come the big kick off, the majority of clubs are in crisis, many have had last-minute coaching changes and the fans are already both familiar and discontented with their team's line-up. The national championship starts cold.

Only when this problem is addressed will Brazilian football get full value from the size of its clubs and their fan bases, and then have a better chance at holding on to more of its great players while still at their peak. ●

Team-by-team preview, page 96

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Where did it all go wrong?

Porto are in danger of finishing the season empty-handed for the first time in eight years

PEDRO PINTO in Lisbon

WINNERS OF four consecutive league titles, Porto saw their season collapse in spectacular fashion during a diabolical run of five matches in three weeks that leaves the club, dominant for so long in Portugal, facing the prospect of finishing without a trophy for the first time since 2002.

The result which sent shockwaves throughout Europe was a crushing 5-0 defeat at the hands of Arsenal in the last 16 of the Champions League.

"They took advantage of our mistakes while we failed to take advantage of theirs," said coach Jesualdo Ferreira as he tried to justify the surprising score line.

However, there was far more to it than that. This was a ship that had been sinking and a combination of factors made it sink.

The warning signs had already been seen during a 3-0 defeat to Sporting in the league just 10 days earlier. A tired and unmotivated unit was swept aside with ease by the Lions of Lisbon, who suddenly looked like world-beaters even though they had struggled to stay in the top five all season.

In the next round of fixtures, during a 2-2 home draw with lowly Olhanense, Porto looked lost and careless. It could even have been worse as they had been two goals down and salvaged a draw in injury time.

Struggling...the pressure gets to Porto's Ruben Micael

> "The problems all started last summer when Porto sold their two best players"

Heart and soul

It's easy to blame Ferreira, and he has been blamed, with not many people expecting him to be around when the new season starts. The problems all started last summer when Porto sold their two best players: Lucho Gonzalez, the heart and soul of the team, went to Marseille, while top scorer Lisandro Lopez left for Lyon. Losing players is nothing new for Porto, but the Argentinian duo left a huge gap that was not filled adequately.

The drop in quality and experience was too much for the team to take and it affected the performances of the core players that did stick around this season. Raul Meireles and Bruno Alves, for example, have looked disinterested and frustrated at times. They have both been linked with moves abroad and it has become clear they are both ready to go. They have won it all, domestically, with the club and are now looking for new challenges.

So what's next? Porto may have to go back to the drawing board. Even if they win the Portuguese Cup, this season will be branded as a disaster and they will have to build from the ground up. A new boss will surely come in and he needs to invest heavily in the transfer market if the club is going to regain its dominant position in Portuguese football – especially if you consider Benfica, disappointing for so many seasons, have enjoyed a remarkable resurgence and will take some beating.

Porto found that out the hard way when they lost the League Cup Final to their perennial rivals 3-0 in the Algarve at the end of March. ●

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Violent times

The death of a PSG supporter has reignited concerns about the violent fringe at Parc des Princes

FRANCE

HOWARD JOHNSON in Paris

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN'S atrocious league campaign would normally be cause for massive concern around the French capital. Not right now, though. Under current circumstances, the disastrous form of Antoine Kombouare's overpaid underachievers – who currently sit in mid-table, 16 points behind league leaders Bordeaux who have played two games less – seems nothing more than an aside, a footnote in the ongoing soap opera of a club that has now witnessed a whole new level of worrying violence.

In November 2006, PSG supporter Julien Quemener was killed in an altercation with police outside the club's home stadium following a UEFA Cup game against Hapoel Tel Aviv. Over the years there have been frequent skirmishes with supporters of Marseille. And there have also been several games played behind closed doors due to any number of violent incidents, particularly when PSG have travelled away from home.

However, the death of Yann Lorence has opened up a whole new dimension in the sorry tale of PSG-linked violence.

The 37-year-old was killed on the night of February 28, just before PSG found themselves on the end of a humiliating 3-0 home defeat at the hands of bitter rivals Marseille. Fighting had broken out in the Porte de Saint-Cloud district of the capital and Lorence died lying in a pool of blood after being badly beaten.

Any death as a direct result of football is shocking enough. Yet this particular fatality was even more disturbing because there wasn't a single Marseille supporter anywhere near PSG's Parc des Princes ground or anywhere else associated with the match. After numerous hours of discussions the day before the match, the 1,500 Marseille fans who had intended to head north to the capital decided to boycott the game in protest at the threat of being searched by police before boarding their coaches.

The subtext of the fans seemed to be "we're not like those animals from Paris and, if we're treated as such, we simply won't bother".

If the intention was above all to highlight PSG's massive hooligan problem, then the plan worked to perfection. Four PSG supporters have now been charged with the homicide of a man who any outsider would view simply as one of their own. This, however, isn't quite the case.

Riot...police clash with PSG fans before February's home game against Marseille

> "The death of Yann Lorence has opened up a whole new dimension in the sorry tale of PSG-linked violence"

The four accused are regulars in the Auteuil stand, which is at the opposite end of the Parc des Princes ground from the Boulogne stand, where Lorence used to watch PSG, and to understand why such an incident could have occurred, you have to look to the club's history.

Skinhead clientele

After PSG were founded in 1970 the lack of atmosphere at home games was an early worry for the club's directors, who tried to rectify the problem by offering cheap tickets to young fans. However, the combination of an easy rallying point and freely-available beer in the stadium meant that the Boulogne end of the ground soon became known for its, admittedly minority, skinhead clientele.

When the French TV channel Canal+ took control of PSG in 1991 they recognised the problems of trying to appeal to a multicultural Parisian public while the spectre of right-wing Boulogne supporters hung over the club. Perhaps naively the new management attempted to rectify the problem by developing the opposite end of the ground – the Auteuil stand – as a haven for blacks and Arabs.

A nice idea in theory, maybe, but it inadvertently acknowledged that the Boulogne stand was effectively a stand for whites. It didn't take long before the two stands developed their own distinct cultural identities alongside a mistrust of each other that clearly had the potential to boil over.

On the 10th anniversary of one of their supporters' groups in 2003, the Auteuil unfurled a banner proclaiming "The Future Is Ours". Members of the Boulogne gangs took this as a clear threat to their historic position as the club's pre-eminent supporters and the relationship between the two ends rapidly deteriorated.

The club attempted to calm things down by introducing a number of hardline security measures, but threats were made to former PSG president Francis Graille that were considered sufficiently serious for him to be put under police protection and the initiative faltered.

In recent times, a more softly-softly approach by the club's directors, which included trying to engage with the various supporters' groups, appeared to have been making progress. However, the death of Lorence has put a stop to any feeling that the club should in some way interact with their hardcore hooligans.

Current PSG president Robin Leproux has decreed the club won't sell any tickets for away games, while premises that had been provided by PSG for use by various supporters clubs have been declared off limits. Members of the Auteuil gangs have responded by saying they'll boycott the stadium until such time as things are sorted out to their satisfaction.

There's no doubt that Paris Saint-Germain find themselves at a crossroads in an attempt to purge their hooligan element. Whether they can finally succeed, only time will tell. ●

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You're supposed to be at home...PSG's league game away to Nice in March was played behind closed doors

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Here they go again?

Leverkusen's latest wobble reignites fears of past failure

GERMANY

NICK BIDWELL in Munich

ON A CREST OF a wave after setting a new Bundesliga record of 24 games unbeaten at the start of a season, championship-chasing Bayer Leverkusen may have thought they had found a cure for the inconsistency which has undermined every one of their previous attempts to win the league. However, on the evidence of their first game as history makers, there's plenty more research for the works club of the pharmaceutical giants to do.

Not only did a shock 3-2 defeat at lowly Nurnberg mean the end of a glorious 288-day sequence, it also had the "Neverkusen Naysayers" once again calling their nerve into question. And with title rivals Bayern Munich and Schalke in full cry, the last thing Leverkusen need right now is ghosts resurfacing from their near-miss past.

In public, coach Jupp Heynckes responded philosophically to the reverse, with the ex-Bayern Munich and Real Madrid boss saying: "We had to lose some time, but we still find ourselves in a privileged position at the top end of the table.

"Everyone one at this club would have jumped at such a position at the start of the season."

However, "Don Jupp" surely would not have been so sanguine behind closed doors.

Sloppiness and delayed reactions were all his side had to offer in an abysmal first half against Nurnberg and it was only when they went 3-0 down, after 55 minutes, that they finally began to work up a head of steam, reducing the arrears with goals from Stefan Kiessling and Patrick Helmes. But it was too little too late and Nurnberg – for whom on-loan Hamburg striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting scored twice and Mickael Tavares added another – held on for their first win in nearly five months.

Among Heynckes most pressing problems is the loss of form of his talented young keeper Rene Adler, who has been on "gaffe watch" ever since Germany coach Joachim Low indicated that he would be his starter in South Africa. In the *Nationalmannschaft's* recent friendly defeat by Argentina in Munich, Adler's ill-advised dash from his line effectively waved Gonzalo Higuain through to slot home the only goal of the game, and he was equally at fault in Leverkusen's 2-2 draw at Werder Bremen, comically mishandling a Naldo free-kick and allowing a grateful Claudio Pizarro to tap in.

Another international in the dock is attacker Lukas Podolski – once exclusively known for his left-footed shooting power, but who now seems

The end...Breno (in red) of Nurnberg came between Eren Derdyiok (front), Kiessling (rear) and a 25th unbeaten game for Leverkusen

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hell-bent on taking up pugilism as a career. Censured last year for slapping Germany skipper Michael Ballack during a World Cup qualifier against Wales, Podolski once again displayed his hair-trigger temper in an unsavoury confrontation with a TV journalist in the wake of the Argentina game.

No excuse

While it is true Podolski was provoked by Christian Ortlepp, the chief reporter of the DSF sports channel, who, instead of sugaring the pill and gently hinting at the interviewee's under-par performance, went straight for the jugular with the comment "your best moment of the night was in the warm-up", there was still no excuse for the fire and brimstone reaction, the wild attempt to make it physical, the gesticulating and the furious demand that Ortlepp step outside.

Podolski simply would not calm down and even came back for a second rant after originally being led away from the mixed zone by Germany defender Philipp Lahm. Although always a fiery competitor, "Poldi" should have known better.

As rumours of an international suspension began to circulate, an emergency meeting between Low, team manager Oliver Bierhoff and DFB president Theo Zwanziger decided an apology from the miscreant on the federation website would suffice.

Little wonder Podolski was a volcano waiting to erupt. Since returning to his first club Koln last summer, after three unhappy seasons at Bayern, he has hardly pulled up any trees and, while he does have a fine strike rate for the national team (37 goals in 70 appearances), he must realise he is under pressure to retain his place in the side.

Ironic, then, that in his first match after the mayhem in Munich he should score with a free-kick in Koln's creditable 1-1 draw at home to Bayern. It could not have come at a better time, ending the 24-year-old's dreadful run of 1,425 minutes without a goal.

"You know, I might have a tattoo of this number done," was the typical Podolski reaction. ●

War of words

Their is little love lost between Red Star and Partizan – particularly when they are neck and neck for the title

SERBIA

VLADIMIR NOVAK in Belgrade

THE ANIMOSITY between Belgrade clubs Red Star and Partizan, bad enough at the best of times, went up a notch as they entered the closing stages of this season's championship race.

Partizan president Dragan Djuric started the ball rolling by claiming referees favoured Red Star and that his club's administrative board would be issuing an announcement regarding refereeing at their rivals' league games.

Partizan – who at the time were the only team to have beaten Red Star in the league this term – viewed with suspicion a series of wins for their rivals, despite their below-par performances, and the fact Red Star had been awarded five penalties, with none against them, while Partizan had been given just one. Among Partizan fans there were rumours of fixed games and bribed officials.

Red Star chairman Vladan Lukic retaliated with an attack of his own on Partizan, saying: "When someone has a team three times more expensive, but is trailing in the table, such an excuse is welcome. As Djuric is making false accusations towards others, he should remember his own tricks. Everybody knows last spring, after Partizan had secured the title, they lost easily at home against Jagodina and so enabled them to stay in the top flight. And is it true that no single bets were accepted for the game?"

Super Liga officials reacted quickly by launching an investigation into the comments by Lukic and Djuric, with competition commissionaire Branislav Delic announcing: "Both will have to prove the accusations they put forward against each other. Otherwise they will face severe punishment."

Two weeks later, however, Lukic and Djuric were merely issued with fines and warned that they would be suspended should they repeat their verbal slanging match.

But that was far from the end of hostilities. Just as it looked as though the situation was calming down, Lukic became involved in a row with FA president Tomislav Karadzic.

Insults and threats

Karadzic, a former Partizan president, said he had received a phone call from Lukic, who attacked him with insults and threats. Lukic admitted making the call, and that the conversation was emotional, but he denied using vulgar expressions or swearing. He claimed he was responding to a quote from Karadzic regarding the sale and new owner of Red Star.

"I told him to keep his fingers out of Red Star and that our club is not for sale," explained Lukic. "Karadzic told me that I would regret my call and that neither I, nor Red Star's board, would have a say concerning the sale. He said he knew who the buyer was.

"As Red Star president it's my job to protect the club and I will do this always, no matter who attacks it.

"With his behaviour Karadzic showed that, for him, each competition in which Red Star is first is fixed. That's the main problem between us. For us this season is OK, while for him probably the last two seasons, when his club won the double, were OK too. So I ask him: are Red Star allowed to win the league?"

Lukic's activities off the field seem to have done little to help his club's players on it and Red Star lost a second league game – 2-1 away to promoted Metalac – in March. Despite still being top and two points clear of Partizan, coach Vladimir Petrovic was sacked and replaced by youth-team boss Ratko Dostanic. ●

> **"As Djuric is making false accusations towards others, he should remember his own tricks"**
>
> *Red Star's Vladan Lukic attacks the Partizan president*

Red hot...Partizan fans set fire to seats during the Belgrade derby with Red Star

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Decisions, decisions

Maradona can't make up his mind over the World Cup squad

HAVING LOOKED AT over 100 players during the past 12 months, Argentina coach Diego Maradona declared before the friendly against Germany in March that he had made up his mind about 80 per cent of his World Cup squad.

So it was something of a surprise, following a much improved performance and a 1-0 win, that he was talking in terms of knowing only 60 per cent of his squad for South Africa after the game.

Maradona had told his players before the match in Munich to treat it like a World Cup quarter-final and they lined up as they had for the 1-0 win against Uruguay which secured qualification for this summer's showpiece. With what appeared to be the side that might start against Nigeria in June, Argentina showed more ideas, better precision and keener marking than in previous games, but still lacked imagination in attack.

It remains a mystery to many why players such as Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero, Gonzalo Higuain (who scored the winner against Germany), Carlos Tevez and Diego Milito are consistently on target for their European sides, yet fail far too often for their country.

Maradona's frequent mistake seems to have been in putting these players in different positions to the ones they play for their clubs.

Manchester City's Tevez, for example, was sent on for the last 20 minutes against Germany and given few chances out on the wing, while Messi, who has been in prolific goalscoring form this season, plays in a three-man attack for Barcelona but – with Maradona sticking to 4-4-2, or occasionally 4-3-1-2 – he is forced to play further back for the national team.

Against Germany, Messi was often marked by three opponents and was fouled repeatedly – as will almost certainly be the case in South Africa – before he could get into a scoring position. To reproduce some of the many goals he gets in Spain he needs to play further up the pitch where, at the very least if still heavily marked, he could make space for others.

> **"Players such as Messi, Higuain and Tevez are consistently on target for their clubs yet fail far too often for their country. Maradona's mistake has been to play them out of position"**

The argument has long raged over Argentina's best way of playing: 1978 World Cup-winner Cesar Menotti's more attacking style or 1986 winner Carlos Bilardo's more conservative approach. Maradona says his tactics are a mixture of both, yet the present team is more like that of Bilardo and builds from the back.

Maradona's general on the pitch is 35-year-old Juan Sebastian Veron, who distributes play well and dictates the rhythm, but rarely creates chances for the strikers as Juan Roman Riquelme did. Despite repeated pleas from fans, the media and even FA chief Julio Grondona, Riquelme – who quit international football after Maradona criticised him on TV – remains committed to his comment: "I will be on holiday during the World Cup."

Maradona stayed on in Europe after the Germany game to talk personally to his World Cup candidates – and to tell others (such as Internazionale's Javier Zanetti, who holds the national record of 136 caps) that they would not be picked.

While Maradona has been criticised for the number of players used during his reign, it should be remembered that the majority were players from local clubs who he tried out in B internationals. Although it is a good idea to have such games, even in non-World Cup years, only two of these players – Veron and Velez Sarsfield defender Nicolas Otamendi – played against Germany and are likely to be in the World Cup squad.

Argentina have another game scheduled for May 24, against Canada in Buenos Aires, as part of the country's 200-year independence celebrations. Maradona is against the fixture, saying it will interfere with his World Cup preparations, but it sounds more like he is getting in his excuses early in case of a poor performance or defeat, against weaker rivals. The coach continues to be afraid of criticism and hates most of the media for it – though these days he is careful to mind his language after an earlier two-month suspension from FIFA.

Independiente on top

Meanwhile, the clausura is progressing as many had predicted, with Libertadores Cup holders Estudiantes, apertura champions Banfield and Velez Sarsfield looking like the best sides – even if they are struggling to juggle league and Libertadores commitments. As a result, non-cup tied – and not particularly outstanding – Independiente were top at the halfway stage, despite their players being owed two months' wages and bonuses.

Boca and River Plate continue to chop and change their sides and, rather than competing at the top end of the table, find themselves battling to improve their relegation averages – a flawed system which was originally introduced in 1991 to avoid River's relegation from the top flight.

As always there are two constants in Argentinian football: managerial upheaval and hooliganism.

After 10 rounds of league games, three clubs – Racing Club, Atletico Tucuman and Chacarita Juniors – had sacked their coaches, with Fernando Gamboa out of work after choosing promoted Chacarita ahead of a job on the staff of the national team.

Statistics now show that there have been more than 200 football-related deaths with one of the most recent occurring when a gang of Newell's Old Boys hooligans opened fire with a machine gun on buses carrying other Newell's supporters.

Having initially agreed to pay for hooligan groups from several clubs to travel to the World Cup in return their political support, banners at grounds calling for the government's re-election next year were immediately withdrawn when it became clear to the gangs that there was no more money for trips to South Africa. ●

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Who's in, who's out?... Maradona has much food for thought as he crosses the pitch before Argentina's friendly in Munich

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Game on

Roma have taken advantage of Inter's determination to succeed in the Champions League to claw their way back into the Serie A title race

ITALY

PADDY AGNEW in Rome

ALL OF A SUDDEN, we have a contest. For much of this season Internazionale have been the strongest side in Italy with most observers agreeing that they are on course to win a fifth consecutive league title.

By the end of January, Inter were cruising along on top of the table, nine points clear of Milan and 11 ahead of Roma. The *scudetto* looked a mere formality, an annoying but gratifying distraction from the club's main seasonal objective, namely Champions League glory.

Yet by the beginning of April, Roma had whittled down that 11-point deficit to just one following their 2-1 win against Inter in a dramatic game at the Olympic Stadium in Rome.

"We're in the final straight and we'll see what happens," says Roma coach Claudio Ranieri. "We're a metre behind, but we've reopened the title race and Milan are also still in it.

"This will be a game of nerves and possibilities for everyone, but Inter are still favourites because they are ahead."

Daniele De Rossi had given Roma a first-half lead against Inter and Ranieri was delighted at the way his side came back to win with a Luca Toni goal after Diego Milito had equalised for the visitors.

"It was a great game," added Ranieri. "We didn't let our heads drop when they equalised, even though it was offside. We kept believing and we got the win – and that's very important for us."

It is hard not to conclude that, concentrated as they are on Europe, Inter have begun to take their eye off the Serie A ball. In eight games through February and March, they picked up just 10 points as they won two, drew four and lost two (away to Catania and Roma). The sequence represented Inter's worst run in Serie A for five years.

However, it says much about Inter's priorities that their two defeats during this period came on the eve of important Champions League triumphs – firstly the 1-0 second round, second-leg win over Chelsea at Stamford Bridge and then ahead of the first leg of their quarter-final clash with CSKA Moscow at San Siro.

Tactical masterpiece

It was, of course, always possible that the 2-1 first-leg lead against Chelsea, combined with the hype surrounding coach Jose Mourinho's return to England, would be enough to see Inter through. In the end, Mourinho produced a tactical masterpiece with a four-man attack of Milito in front of Goran Pandev, Samuel Eto'o and Wesley Sneijder. For once, attack did indeed prove to be the best means of defence, as Inter shut out Chelsea.

After arguably the team's best Champions League performance of recent, often disappointing, seasons, it was always possible that Inter might then "stumble" over the less motivating opposition of CSKA.

Before the first leg against the Russians, Mourinho gave another of his enigmatic TV interviews in which he complained that, while he was very happy at Inter, he was less than happy with Italian football, saying: "I don't like it and it doesn't like me."

> **"It is hard not to conclude that Inter have begun to take their eye off the Serie A ball"**

Under pressure...Inter's Sneijder (left) and Eto'o

Given that when he returned to Chelsea on a spying mission last Christmas he had prompted a barrage of "The Special One Wants To Return" tabloid headlines with his enthusiastic declarations of affection for the English game, this latest statement was hardly going to go unnoticed.

Were it not that both the Inter fans and the club itself have learned to take Mourinho's increasingly rare public utterances with not so much a pinch as a wheelbarrow of salt, this latest one might have proved destabilising.

The ongoing Mario Balotelli soap opera has done little to help Inter either. For reasons that no outsider appears to understand, and which have yet to be fully explained, Mourinho continues to drop the talented 19-year-old from his squad.

While it has been so far, so good for Inter in the Champions League, rivals Roma will be watching their continuing progress closely in the hope that success in foreign fields will cause them even more distractions on the home front.

Battling on the two fronts has never been easy as just about every big name in the European game has discovered.

Juventus, twice winners of Europe's biggest club prize, were given a rude awakening by former Inter boss Roy Hodgson's Fulham in the last 16 of the Europa League. Leading 3-1 from the first leg, a goal from David Trezeguet after just two minutes of the return in London appeared to have settled matters. However, the Premier League side stormed back to win the tie 5-4 on aggregate.

The stunning turnaround has heaped further pressure on Juventus coach Alberto Zaccheroni, who was only appointed in January – and, according to Giovanni Trapattoni, only after the 71-year-old Republic of Ireland manager himself had turned the job down. ●

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Getting closer... Toni's winner at the Olympic Stadium leaves Roma just a point behind Inter

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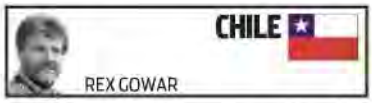
Starting again

Football is playing its part in trying to help the country return to normal after the recent disaster



REX GOWAR

AFTER THE massive earthquake that devastated a large area of the country and caused losses estimated at £20billion, Chile is gradually picking up the pieces.

For some people, going to a football match is part of the healing process, and leading local club sides Universidad de Chile and Universidad Catolica gave their fans something to cheer about as the two Santiago rivals drew 2-2 in an exciting Libertadores Cup game played in the northern city of Coquimbo – the first game to be staged in the country since those dreadful events of February 27.

A 2-1 victory over Brazilian champions Flamengo then put Universidad de Chile on top of Group 8, but for a brief time it looked as if Chile might suffer the same fate this year that befell Mexico last year.

In 2009, South American teams were given the option of not going to Mexico for the away leg of their Libertadores Cup last-16 ties because of the swine flu epidemic in the country. They chose not to and were all given a bye into the quarter-finals.

Flamengo had sought a similar decision from CONMEBOL on visiting Chile while there were still fears of further tremors. However, they were told flatly that the matches in Chile would go ahead.

Universidad de Chile's Uruguayan coach Gerardo Pelusso was scathing towards the Brazilian side, claiming: "Flamengo's move sounds to me like strategy. The Brazilians are not only very good at football, they also have a very good sense of timing: they know when to laugh, when to give the cameras a little kiss, they know how to make your life impossible when they play in Brazil, they know how to be nice when it suits them. I don't believe anything they say."

The game was played in Santiago, which was only marginally affected by the earthquake, and Colo Colo lent their Monumental stadium to arch-rivals Universidad de Chile because Vina del Mar, where *La U* had been playing for the past five months while the Nacional stadium was being refurbished, suffered quake damage.

Flamengo flew south from Rio de Janeiro to Porto Alegre the day before the game and on to Santiago the following day, arriving less than four hours before kick-off and leaving immediately after the game.

Single tournament

The domestic league resumed on the weekend between the two Libertadores games after the Chilean football association (ANFP) announced a changed format for the season. Having playing two separate championships – apertura and clausura – every year since 2002, this season there will be a single tournament with teams meeting each other twice, home and away, in the traditional manner.

There are still complications due to the state of clubs in the most affected areas of the quake, including Universidad de Concepcion from Chile's second largest city, which was close to the epicentre of the quake and suffered immense damage and the loss of hundreds of lives.

Matches have been postponed while these clubs pick themselves up, get their grounds back in shape and, in some cases, cope with the loss of foreign players who chose to return to their home countries.

Ex-Argentina midfielder Claudio Husain, a 35-year-old free agent who had only been with Audax Italiano since January, rescinded his contract, while Uruguayan defender Federico Perez has left Everton. However, neither was a first-team regular.

Colombian midfielder Macnelly Torres, who plays for Colo Colo, denied he was leaving after reports claimed his wife wanted to go home.

"I never said I'm leaving because of the earthquake or tremors," he told a local radio station. "It's a very big lie. I have to say this because it's the truth.

"Obviously I sent my family (home) because I live in a flat and my wife got a bit nervous about everything and for me it was better for my family to be in Colombia."

He said a meeting with the club authorities had been arranged before the quake, adding: "It had nothing to do with the earthquake...I want to look at the possibility of leaving and improving, economically and football-wise."

> **"How will the disruption to football in Chile affect the national team's performance at the World Cup?"**

Training sessions were at times called off because of tremors and players from second division Rangers suspended training in solidarity with six members of their squad who were left homeless by the earthquake.

Federation president Harold Mayne-Nicholls said Chile would be able to work towards staging the 2015 Copa America despite the quake damage. Brazil, who hold the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016, have said they would postpone their right to stage the South American championship. They should have succeeded next year's hosts Argentina.

One big question still to be answered is how will the disruption to domestic football in Chile affect the national team's performance at the World Cup?

It has certainly disrupted coach Marcelo Bielsa's build-up. A double-header warm-up against North Korea and Costa Rica, scheduled for March 3, the week after the quake, was cancelled. Meanwhile a friendly against Venezuela was arranged for March 31 in Temuco, a city in the southern part of the country hit by the earthquake. The national team are also due to meet Mexico on May 16. ●

"Hang in there Chile"...fans show their solidarity

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Desire...Universidad de Chile's Felipe Seymour (left) gets the better of Flamengo's Rodrigo Alvim

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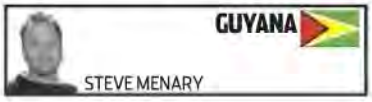
Your country needs you

The future success of Guyana's national team may depend on players plying their trade in England



WHEN JAMAICA and Trinidad & Tobago qualified for the World Cup finals in 1998 and 2006 respectively, a new bar was set for Caribbean football; particularly for English-speaking countries such as Guyana, who envisaged emulating those two teams.

Football in Guyana remains amateur and opportunities to play professionally are limited but, between 2005 and 2007, the national team leapt 90 places in the FIFA rankings after going on a 14-match unbeaten run. Under former coach Jamaal Shabazz, aspirations that they could become the first country with a population of less than a million to go to the World Cup finals suddenly did not seem so unlikely.

"Guyana has some of the most talented players I have seen in the Caribbean," says Shabazz. "Any four of their top six strikers have the pace to contend for an Olympic sprint relay medal, which makes them so deadly."

In 2007, the Golden Jaguars were close to a first qualification for the CONCACAF Gold Cup, romping through the Caribbean Cup qualifiers unbeaten and only missing out on the semi-finals – and a Gold Cup spot – on goal difference to Cuba.

With a number of players in the UK eligible to play for Guyana through their parents – such as brothers Carl Cort (Brentford) and Leon Cort (Burnley), and Jay Bothroyd (Cardiff City) – the Guyana Football Federation (GFF) began to look at recruiting them for the 2010 World Cup qualifiers.

Nothing came of it; instead, Howard Newton and his brother Jake, both of non-league Staines Town, were called up. But what they found in Guyana was not what they anticipated.

"I couldn't get over the fact that the national team had nowhere to play, no stadium, no training pitches of their own," said Howard.

Despite being given a bye to the second round of their regional World Cup qualifiers, Guyana lost both games to neighbours Surinam and the slide began. In the qualifiers for the next Caribbean Cup, Guyana needed to win in their final match with Trinidad & Tobago to progress, but could only draw 1-1 and a dispute between the players and the federation over expenses led to Shabazz quitting.

Best...Hercules

Hopeful...Beveney

"I tried to create a higher sense of professionalism within the team and it forced the federation to have to act more professionally with the players and to look for more funding," says Shabazz. "They resented that and I could feel a deep sense of hostility from them, while the players started making demands for better treatment.

"When we did not qualify for the Caribbean Championship in 2008, the federation saw me as the root of their problem. Since I did not achieve qualification for the World Cup nor the Caribbean finals, I felt the decent thing was to offer my resignation."

Shabazz's legacy was to help a number of Guyanese players get professional contracts in the Trinidad & Tobago league and he has also returned there, working as technical director of Caledonia AIA and coaching for the T&T FA.

Shabazz's assistant Wayne Dover succeeded him as national coach. Selection has since been restricted mostly to local players but Guyana showed their potential in winning the Surinam Independence Cup last year.

English experience...Guyana's Beveney (in red) in action for Dulwich Hamlet

Yet for those players playing abroad, what seems like a new dawn has dissipated. Collie Hercules, who plays for Tobago United in T&T and is widely considered one of the country's best-ever players, says: "It was my dream to play in England or one of the other big leagues, but that opportunity was never there. Today opportunities are greater but still not that easy to come by. There isn't much help, if any at all, to get our players in a decent league."

Two decades after coming to power as GFF president, Colin Klass has still not secured a permanent home for the national side – who currently play at a cricket ground – and money seems to remain a problem. A £275,000 training-centre project, of which FIFA granted £250,000 in 2006, had still not arrived by the start of this year, and Guyana still has no professional league, even though the annual Kashif & Shanghai Knockout Tournament attracts enthusiastic crowds.

Using FIFA's stipend of £630,000 every four years, plus commercial backing, Klass hopes to introduce a development league by 2011 and believes qualification for the Gold Cup is "a realistic goal, sooner or later".

Despite this, stalwarts such as Hercules, who played the last of his 33 games for Guyana in 2009, see the end not a beginning. "It's pretty hard to say I will not play for my country again but under the current administration I don't see it happening," he says.

National team captain Shawn Beveney, who had a spell in England with non-league Dulwich Hamlet, does see a solution. "It would be such a big thing for the team if the English professionals like Leon and Carl Cort could come back and play," he says. "I think we could qualify for the Gold Cup. They could do for Guyana what Jocelyn Angloma did for Guadeloupe."

Angloma, a former France defender, helped Guadeloupe qualify for their first Gold Cup in 2007, when the French colony went on to reach the semi-finals – despite losing to Guyana 3-2 en route. ●

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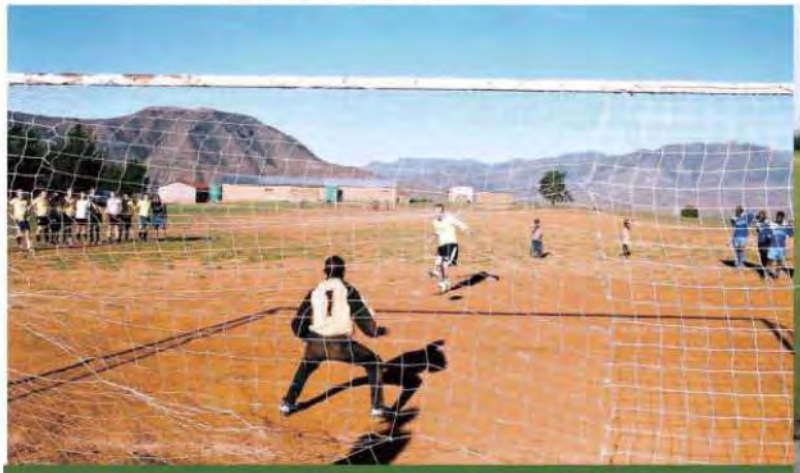
BRINGING THE WORLD CUP TO LESOTHO

BRINGING LESOTHO TO THE WORLD



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Picture courtesy of Kick4Life

"What Kick4Life are doing in Lesotho is fantastic...We must encourage and support this programme." Fabio Capello

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Book online now at www.lesotho2010.org

Pictures courtesy of the English Football Association and Kick4Life

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Down and out...Kaka shows his frustration at being dumped out of the Champions League by Lyon

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Another fine mess

Real Madrid's failure to reach the Champions League quarter-finals for the sixth year running provoked inevitable frustration in the Spanish capital. Sid Lowe reports

THE GIGANTIC banner unfurled at the Santiago Bernabeu roared: "We'll be back." Well, not this year, you won't. For the sixth successive season Real Madrid have been eliminated at the first knockout stage of the Champions League, sent packing by Lyon – just as they were, with increasing ease, by Juventus, Arsenal, Bayern Munich, Roma and Liverpool.

That painful fact sparked a search for solutions. It would also have sparked a search for scapegoats but for one thing...the search was already under way. The guilty men had been singled out before they'd committed the crime.

When Cristiano Ronaldo was presented to Madrid supporters after signing in the summer, he was accompanied by the returning president Florentino Perez, Alfredo Di Stefano and Eusebio. Just as importantly, he was accompanied by the club's nine European Cups. For anyone who hadn't understood what Perez meant by "returning Madrid to their rightful place", the message was clear: never mind La Liga – after all, Ramon Calderon won two of those – Madrid's rightful place was among the European elite.

The European Cup obsesses Madrid. It is a competition they feel they have a hold over and one that certainly has a hold over them. It is the true measure of their greatness. Yet it is eight years since they won it, By that measure, the biggest club of all is not a big club at all. Even with Ronaldo, even with Kaka, even with the greatest summer-spending spree in history – a whopping £230million.

The obsession

That outlay was no coincidence. This year the obsession was even greater, particularly for Perez. Barcelona's treble last season upped the stakes; so did the former president's return – having ridden back in as the saviour, despite the fact that his first spell ended with the longest trophy-less drought in over half a century, he was determined to crown his return with glory. All the more so with the Final being held at the Bernabeu. Presiding over a 10th European Cup in your own stadium, what could be better?

Or, to put it another way, what

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Dead man walking...coach Pellegrini appears to be under attack from all sides, even though he retains the support of some of the fans

could be worse? What could possibly go wrong?

Defeat by Lyon means Madrid will now be presiding over someone else's party. And worse still, that someone else could be Barcelona. Or Internazionale, led by Wesley Sneijder, the Dutchman they off-loaded against the coach's wishes. Or Bayern, led by Arjen Robben, the other Dutchman they off-loaded against the coach's wishes. Or a Ronaldo-less Manchester United.

The league title has suddenly been repackaged and infused with significance, but few are fooled. This season was all about the Champions League.

That's why the sports daily *AS* ran the word "catastrophe" across its cover in huge yellow letters. That's why even though Madrid were top of the league, breaking record after record, it felt like the end of the world. Their coach was statistically their best ever, but the capital's other sports paper, *Marca*, screamed: "Goodbye champions", "Goodbye Pellegrini."

That reaction was no surprise. *Marca* had been going for coach Manuel Pellegrini since the start. At best, he appeared expendable; at worst, he could be forgiven for feeling as though everyone was conspiring against him.

However, he didn't help himself. His decision to replace Kaka against Lyon sentenced an already condemned man, with Kaka's representative describing the coach as "a coward who hides his own inadequacies by pointing at others".

On the night of the knock out, most felt Pellegrini would depart the Bernabeu in a box. Jorge Valdano, the club's general manager, insisted he wouldn't be fired, though few believed him. But Pellegrini was not sacked. In fact, three weeks later, Valdano was describing his work – in La Liga, at least – as "impeccable".

But that appeared a temporary respite. When Pellegrini noted that there was no point in sacking him because "this is a long-term project", the response was inevitable: it may well be, sunshine, but you won't be at the head of it.

Not enough

Even winning the league – unless they were to produce a brilliant battering of Barcelona – probably won't be enough. *Marca* seems desperate to see Pellegrini leave, preferably before the season's end, and they are not alone.

But the paper's campaign against the Chilean had been so bare-faced, vindictive and downright dishonest, and his response so measured and dignified, that, if anything, they have achieved the opposite of what they intended: fans ended up supporting him.

When *Marca* declared Madrid versus Villarreal was Pellegrini "on trial", Madrid won 6-2, their best performance of the season. When they called for his head after the Lyon disaster, almost 75 per cent of an online poll said he shouldn't be sacked. But the editor claimed that the poll was not worthy because, "lots of Barcelona fans had voted", so they set about doing a "proper poll", using a market research company to canvas Madrid members at the Bernabeu.

> **Defeat by Lyon means Madrid will now be presiding over someone else's party. And worse still that someone else could be Barcelona**

This time, *Marca* claimed only "33 per cent of fans want Pellegrini to continue". But the results revealed that the actual question wasn't about "should Pellegrini continue?", it was "who would you like as coach next season". Pellegrini had polled twice as many votes as anyone else. Second was the Getafe coach, Michel, who was favourite for the *socias* (female fans, as opposed to *socios* – all of the fans).

But it wasn't just Pellegrini in the firing line. Some of the players were too. Kaka's consistently disappointing performances meant that even his galactico status was insufficient, with one Madrid columnist writing: "My patience has run out with Kaka. A player who cost €75m cannot play like a YTS apprentice."

Guti complained that Madrid were not playing as a team. It was an accusation that Pellegrini repeated, describing his side as "individualistic." The man to blame, said *Marca*, was Gonzalo Higuain. Again, their choice of target was significant as Higuain was picked ahead of a Perez signing, Karim Benzema.

In an article that smelt like a politically motivated leak, *Marca* "revealed" that Madrid's players were furious with Higuain's selfish attitude.

Twice against Lyon, the paper said, he hadn't passed the ball to Ronaldo. On the *Punto Pelota* television programme, where the editorial line has been clearly marked from the beginning, they showed the video over and over – just as they had when Higuain had allegedly not passed the ball to Benzema earlier this season.

Meanwhile, there was little mention of Ronaldo's win-it-alone approach. Where there was, it was his individualism that was interpreted as "a product of his winning mentality". Higuain's was plain greediness.

Just as there was no mention

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of Ronaldo's missed sitter against Barcelona when Higuain's miss against Lyon was presented as evidence that when it came to big games he could not be relied upon. Unlike Benzema, who scored in Milan.

Most could hardly believe it. Higuain has the best goals per minute ratio in La Liga, won his side more points than Messi, and scored seven more than Ronaldo and 18 more than Benzema. No wonder most members ignored the campaign, with 87 per cent of them insisting that Higuain should not be sold.

But if they didn't want Higuain sold, they did want others bought, with 63.8 per cent demanding the purchase of David Silva from Valencia.

In response to a pre-prepared list of signings, 55.4 per cent said they wanted Cesc Fabregas, 46.8 per cent David Villa, 44.75 per cent Jesus Navas from Sevilla, 40.2 per cent Franck Ribery and 37.5 per cent Wayne Rooney.

Only 26.7 per cent wanted to buy Leo Messi but perhaps they were just being realistic, while 24.6 per cent wanted Sergio Aguero and 24.3 per cent asked for Ashley Cole – or Andy Cole as the paper's website had it.

Real Madrid's second galactic era had opened exactly as the first had closed: with failure. Yet few supporters questioned the model or its architect.

According to another *Marca* poll, if there were presidential elections tomorrow Perez would win by a landslide, with 88 per cent of the vote.

Defeat against Lyon had drawn the most simple, and familiar, of conclusions at the Bernabeu: we haven't got enough superstars. Let's sack the coach and sign some more! ●

REAL TARGETS

Who supporters voted for as coach next season

Manuel PELLEGRINI 33%

MICHEL 16%

Arsene WENGER 12%

Fabio CAPELLO 6%

Luis ARAGONES 5%

Michael LAUDRUP 4%

Rafa BENITEZ 0%

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50 UNFORGETTA

In the fourth of our series celebrating 50 years of *World*

BENFICA 5 REAL MADRID 3

MAY 2, 1962

Despite Madrid leading 2-0 after 23 minutes, and Ferenc Puskas scoring a hat-trick before half-time, Benfica came back with two strikes from Eusebio to retain the European Cup in a battle between the only two clubs to win the trophy in its first seven years.

In June 1962, Eric Batty wrote in *World Soccer*: "Benfica were worthy winners on the day...but never at any time did they ever rise to the peaks of Real Madrid, vintage 1960."

● Real Madrid's epic 7-3 win v Eintracht Frankfurt in the 1960 Final was four months before *World Soccer* was first published.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR 5 ATLETICO MADRID 1

MAY 15, 1963

Tottenham became the first English club to win a European trophy with this emphatic Cup-winners Cup victory in Rotterdam against the Spaniards. Jimmy Greaves and Terry Dyson each scored twice; Dyson sealing the win with a run that began in his own half and a shot that finished in the top corner of the net.

NORTH KOREA 1 ITALY 0

JULY 19, 1966

Arguably the biggest World Cup upset of all time as North Korea beat the two-times world champions to reach the quarter-finals. Pak Doo-ik's goal at Ayresome Park, Middlesbrough, secured the unlikely win.

In the September 1966 issue of *World Soccer*, Doug Weatherall reported: "A small trumpet, festooned in Italian colours, lay among the ashes of the track round Ayresome Park...a souvenir for Middlesbrough of a World Cup bid which fell flat in sensational circumstances and a reminder that the East had emerged as a soccer area to be taken seriously."

PORTUGAL 5 NORTH KOREA 3

JULY 23, 1966

Continuing where they left off against Italy, North Korea stunned Portugal by racing into a 3-0 lead in 25 minutes. But they couldn't maintain their shock form and a Eusebio-inspired Portugal hit back to win 5-3, with the "Black Pearl" scoring four times.

In September 1966 issue of *World Soccer*, Ken Oultram wrote: "The Koreans knew only one way to play and that was in a forward direction. If they had had the know-how to muster in defence they might have stopped the great Eusebio and his four goals. But who could have stopped Eusebio in this kind of form?"

ENGLAND 4 WEST GERMANY 2

JULY 30, 1966

England's one and only World Cup success came on home soil thanks mainly to a Geoff Hurst hat-trick. England were leading 2-1 until the 90th minute, when Wolfgang Weber slid in at the far post to equalise and send the game into extra time. Two goals from Hurst, one courtesy of a Soviet linesman, secured the victory for the host nation.

Roger MacDonald wrote in the September 1966 issue of *World Soccer*: "England's victory was one of organisation and teamwork, not of technique. Undoubtedly the best team won the Jules Rimet trophy."

CELTIC 2 INTERNAZIONALE 1

MAY 25, 1967

The first British club to win the European Cup and all 11 players came from within a 30-mile radius of Celtic Park. Inter took an early lead and then sat back to defend it. Celtic finally broke down the barriers with goals from Tommy Gemmell and Steve Chalmers to seal the win.

STRENGTH IN TEAMWORK

In *World Soccer* July 1967 issue, Roger MacDonald reported: "Lisbon's little moat did not deter Celtic's thousands of supporters, who engulfed their heroes until the pitch was a sea of scarves, kilts and banners. Billy McNeill, scarcely protected by the Lisbon police, ran the gauntlet to receive the European Cup: won at last by a non-Latin side, a British club, by surely the finest team in the history of Scottish football."

> "The pitch was a sea of scarves, kilts and banners"

ENGLAND 2 SCOTLAND 3

APRIL 15, 1967

In this 1968 European Championship qualifier, England suffered their first defeat at Wembley since winning the World Cup the previous year and their opponents took great pleasure in declaring themselves the first "unofficial world champions" thanks to goals from Denis Law, Bobby Lennox and Jim McCalliog. Despite the Scottish win, England still ended up topping the group and qualifying for the finals in Italy.

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BLE GAMES

Soccer, we select the greatest matches of the past five decades

Words: Duncan Bond

MANCHESTER UNITED 4 BENFICA 1

MAY 29, 1968

Ten years after the Munich air disaster, Matt Busby's United finally won the European Cup on a euphoric Wembley night. Two goals from Bobby Charlton and one each from George Best and Brian Kidd eventually sealed the win in extra time.

World Soccer's Philip Rising reported in the July 1968 issue: "And so it was all over. [Bobby] Charlton, completely spent both physically and mentally, went back to the hotel and straight to bed. It had been a long, hard and, at times, cruel world. But for Munich they would, I feel sure, have got there earlier."

MILAN 4 AJAX 1

MAY 28, 1969

A somewhat one-sided affair, but a dazzling attacking display by Milan saw them win their second European Cup, courtesy of three goals from Pierino Prati, the last time a hat-trick was scored in the final.

World Soccer reported in July 1969: "Milan, renowned for their defensive strategy, switched tactics and crushed Ajax 4-1 in a thrilling display of attacking football."

BRAZIL 1 ENGLAND 0

JUNE 7, 1970

In the heat of Guadalajara, this World Cup game ranks as one of the greatest ever. Jairzinho scored the only goal, but Bobby Moore's tackle on Pele and Gordon Banks' save from the same player were moments of skill that have arguably never been surpassed.

In July 1970, *World Soccer* reported: "After Banks had made a brilliant save from Pele's header, England contained Brazil. Even Banks had no chance with Jairzinho's vicious shot but Jeff Astle, on as a substitute, missed a golden opportunity to level the scores."

ENGLAND 2 WEST GERMANY 3

JUNE 14, 1970

With just 20 minutes of this World Cup quarter-final in Leon, Mexico, remaining, the holders England led 2-0 and their manager, Alf Ramsey, decided that it would be a good idea to substitute Bobby Charlton in order to give him some rest before the semi-final. Disaster then struck as quick goals from Franz Beckenbauer and Uwe Seeler sent the game into extra time, and an acrobatic Gerd Muller volley won it for Germany.

In July 1970, *World Soccer* reported: "[Jurgen] Grabowski beat players at will and it was from his cross that Lohr headed back across goal for Muller to score. Apart from one miss, Muller had been rarely in the game but he proved in a split second what an opportunist he is."

ITALY 4 WEST GERMANY 3

JUNE 17, 1970

A thrilling World Cup semi-final. West Germany equalised in injury time and a further five more were scored in extra time, including two for Gerd Muller. But it was Gianni Rivera's cool finish that secured Italy's place in the Final.

World Soccer reported in July 1970: "Italy – with one goal in their first three matches, and eight in the last two – showed that they possess fine attacking skill when forced to use it. But with the generous injury time the match would have closed with the result 1-0 to Italy – not an unfamiliar score line."

BRAZIL 4 ITALY 1

JUNE 21, 1970

A majestic performance by Brazil saw them demolish a strong Italy side by playing some of the most majestic football ever seen. Goals from Pele, Gerson, Jairzinho and captain Carlos Alberto gave them their third Jules Rimet trophy.

BRAZIL–CAMPEON DEL MUNDO
Champions of the World

World Soccer reported in July 1970: "It was not simply a magnificent, and thoroughly deserved, triumph for Brazil. Here was proof that football, played the way it was meant to be performed, with artistry and skill, can still succeed in the modern era."

> "Here was proof that football, played with artistry and skill, can still succeed in the modern era"

EAST GERMANY 1 WEST GERMANY 0

JUNE 22, 1974

In front of more than 60,000 fans in Hamburg, East Germany upset their neighbours and hosts with a solitary goal from Jurgen Sparwasser. It was the only game of the World Cup that Helmut Schoen's team failed to win. East Germany qualified as group winners but managed just one point in the second-phase group games.

In August 1974, *World Soccer* reported: "It was almost as if East Germany had saved everything up for this game beforehand, tried so hard in this match and had nothing to give afterwards."

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HOLLAND 2 BRAZIL 0

JULY 3, 1974

Brazil, minus Pele, were a major disappointment in the 1974 World Cup as they tried to defend the title they won four years earlier. In what amounted to a semi-final against Holland (it was actually a second-phase group game), they were outplayed by a team that included the likes of Cruyff, Neeskens, Krol and Rensenbrink.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA 2 WEST GERMANY 2

(CZECHOSLOVAKIA 5-3 ON PENS)
JUNE 20, 1976

The last time any German national team lost a penalty shoot-out gave Czechoslovakia the 1976 European Championship. They twice led their West German opponents, but with the score at 2-2, after 90 minutes and extra time, it went to spot-kicks.

World Soccer reported in the July 1976 issue: "After seven firmly hit spot-kicks had found their mark, Uli Hoeness blazed over. It was left to [Antonin] Panenka to win the trophy with a superb, chipped and bent penalty that even Pele couldn't have equalled."

SCOTLAND 3 HOLLAND 2

JUNE 11, 1978

In a game Scotland had to win by three clear goals to progress to the second phase of the 1978 World Cup, they so very nearly achieved it. When Archie Gemmill gave his country a 3-1 lead midway through the second half – and, in the words of BBC commentator David Coleman, "put Scotland in dreamland" – it looked well and truly on.

World Soccer takes up the story in the July 1978 issue: "The Scottish fans were making all the noise in the stadium – but for just four minutes. That's how long it took the Dutch to raise their game. Skipper [Ruud] Krol sent [Johnny] Rep through the middle to strike a rising shot into [Alan] Rough's top corner. Scotland went out of the World Cup."

BARCELONA 4 FORTUNA DUSSELDORF 3

MAY 16, 1979

After 90 minutes of this European Cup-winners Cup Final the score was 2-2, with the German side twice coming from behind and keeper Jorg Daniel saving a penalty. Barca won in extra time – a decade after losing a Final in the same Basle stadium.

In the June 1979 issue, *World Soccer* reported: "In the end it all came down to the contrast between the two men wearing the No3 jerseys. In the white corner Gerd Zewe, all skill, poise, adventure, fluidity and attacking extravagance from his role as sweeper. In the blue (and red) corner Migueli, a towering presence in the air, a granite cliff in the tackle, first a sweeper, then a stopper... above all the security in the heart of defence which tipped the scales and the Cup-winners Cup to Barcelona."

BRAZIL 2 USSR 1

JUNE 14, 1982

One of the best Brazil teams of all time – even though they never managed to win the World Cup – secured this group victory with two brilliant goals, one each from captain Socrates and Eder, in the last 15 minutes, following some near exhibition football against the Soviet side.

World Soccer reported in the July 1982 issue: "Russia, calmly impressive for lengthy periods, offered the South Americans little encouragement. They underlined the fact that they have guile as well as muscle and discipline. But in the end they had nothing to resist the exuberant skills of a side intent on living up to so many expectations."

ITALY 3 BRAZIL 2

JULY 5, 1982

A Paolo Rossi hat-trick accounted for World Cup favourites Brazil and sent Italy into the semi-finals. Brazil twice equalised, through Socrates and Falcao, in this end-to-end game but it was not enough as an inspired Italy went on to win the World Cup.

World Soccer reported in its August 1982 edition: "We'd had some pleasing matches, the occasional outstanding individual performances, but now the classic. This Latin quarter of the World Cup's second phase was bound to provide the colourful, the controversial and the compelling. Brazil were everybody's favourites. Yet on this marvellous afternoon they were matched and eventually outmanoeuvred by a side who discovered they could meet the ultimate challenge."

WEST GERMANY 3 FRANCE 3

(WEST GERMANY 5-4 ON PENS)
JULY 8, 1982

This World Cup semi-final is best remembered for the Harald Schumacher foul on Patrick Battiston, but it was a game of pure theatre with the French midfield of Platini, Giresse and Tigana so nearly upsetting the powerful Germans.

World Soccer reported in its August 1982 edition: "When great matches of the World Cup and the competition's most dramatic moments are recounted, there will always be a place for this remarkable duel between French skill and West German stamina."

ABERDEEN 2 REAL MADRID 1

MAY 11, 1983

On a wet and windswept night in Gothenburg, Alex Ferguson led unfancied Aberdeen to a European Cup-winners Cup Final win against Real Madrid, managed by Alfredo Di Stefano. A header by substitute John Hewitt in extra time sealed this most unlikely victory.

> "This was the first time Madrid had been beaten by Scottish opposition in Europe"

In the June 1983 edition of *World Soccer*, Jonathan Shallard wrote: "This was the first time Madrid had been beaten by Scottish opposition in Europe and the first time Aberdeen had reached a European Final, let alone won one. That they deserved to, no one could deny."

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FRANCE 3 PORTUGAL 2

JUNE 23, 1984

This European Championship semi-final in Marseille came to life in extra time. With the score at 1-1, Portugal took the lead in the eighth minute of the extra period only for France to level again with just six minutes remaining. Then in the final seconds Michel Platini latched on to a Jean Tigana cross to bury the ball in the back of the Portuguese net.

In July 1984, *World Soccer* reported: "With barely a pause for breath we roared into the second period of extra time. The atmosphere was so infectious that the Portuguese forgot about slowing down the game. And thus they played into French hands – though it wasn't until the last six minutes that the magic show reached a climax."

BAYER UERDINGEN 7 DYNAMO DRESDEN 3

MARCH 19, 1986

In this European Cup-winners Cup quarter-final, Dynamo Dresden held a 5-1 aggregate lead over their western neighbours Bayer Uerdingen with just 32 minutes of the second leg left. Three quick goals in nine minutes, followed by three more in the last 12 minutes gave the West German club an amazing victory.

In May 1986, *World Soccer* reported: "An astonishing match began with Dresden crossing the (Berlin) Wall two goals ahead. By half-time they had stretched that aggregate lead to 5-1. But a remarkable spell of six goals in half an hour past Dresden substitute keeper Ramme, turned the tie around."

BELGIUM 4 USSR 3

JUNE 15, 1986

This second round World Cup tie in Leon was a classic. The game finished 2-2 after 90 minutes with the USSR having led twice. But, in extra-time, goals from Stephane Demol and Nico Claesen secured a win for the brilliant Belgians. Igor Belanov had scored a hat-trick but he had still somehow finished on the losing side.

World Soccer reported in July 1986: "From the most unexpected source came a classic World Cup tie. (Jan) Ceulemans was the outstanding player...The only disappointment at the end was the exit of, perhaps, the Soviet Union's finest World Cup team."

FRANCE 1 BRAZIL 1

(FRANCE 4-3 ON PENS)
JUNE 21, 1986

This was a match between arguably the two best teams at the 1986 World Cup. Careca gave Brazil the lead only for Michel Platini to equalise before half-time. The second half produced exhilarating football with Joel Bats' penalty save from Zico the highlight. Extra time couldn't produce a winner and, although Platini missed in the penalty shoot-out, France won through.

In July 1986 *World Soccer* reported: "The match was a classic of all that is good in football in the old and the new world. But as Brazil discovered yet again, to play well and lose can be only the merest consolation."

ARGENTINA 2 ENGLAND 1

JUNE 22, 1986

Diego Maradona scored twice, one from the "hand of God" the other a stroke of genius, to knock Bobby Robson's gallant England team out of the World Cup.

World Soccer reported in July 1986: "From the press stand it was not clear if Maradona had deflected Hodge's sliced back pass beyond Shilton with head or hand. Television evidence proved it was his hand and Maradona later confirmed it. A pity he did not have the grace to do so at the time. But four minutes later he confirmed his brilliant form with one of the finest solo goals of this or any other World Cup."

CRACKING CAMEROON
Argies scrape home

CAMEROON 1 ARGENTINA 0

JUNE 8, 1990

The biggest World Cup shock since North Korea beat Italy in 1966 came in the opening game of the 1990 tournament when a Francois Omam-Biyick header was enough to defeat holders Argentina, Diego Maradona et al.

In July 1990 *World Soccer* reported: "At last, after all the waiting and wondering, the most sensational opening match in World Cup history. The defending champions were beaten by a force out of Africa who not only deserved their triumph but achieved it with nine men after seeing two of their heroes sent off."

> "The defending champions were beaten by a force out of Africa who not only deserved their triumph but achieved it with nine men"

WEST GERMANY 2 HOLLAND 1

JUNE 24, 1990

A World Cup second round game that had just about everything, including a spat between Frank Rijkaard and Rudi Voller which culminated in both being sent off. That apart, the game itself was full of skill and, despite a late Dutch penalty, Germany ended up worthy winners.

World Soccer reported in July 1990: "(Referee) Loustau showed Voller the red card and sent Rijkaard off to join him as he spat full into Voller's hair. It was an appalling display by Rijkaard who had been in trouble after only three minutes when the referee told him to tuck his shirt in. The expulsions damaged Holland more than Germany since an important cog in their creative mechanism had been removed."

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"Denmark's victory was the most unpredictable in the modern game"

Danes put new life into Europe

DENMARK 2 GERMANY 0

JUNE 26, 1992

For a team that replaced war-torn Yugoslavia at the last minute, Denmark waltzed away from Gothenburg as European champions following this amazing win against favourites Germany.

In July 1992, Keir Radnedge wrote in *World Soccer*: "Euro 92 will not be remembered as a classical feast of football technique, but it will never be forgotten. That is all to the credit not of the flawed giants of Germany and Holland or the self-deluding also-rans from France and England...but to the nation which, within four weeks, gave Europe a jolt in both political and sporting terms. Denmark's victory was the most unpredictable in the modern game. But as (defeated) German manager Berti Vogts admitted, they earned it and deserved it."

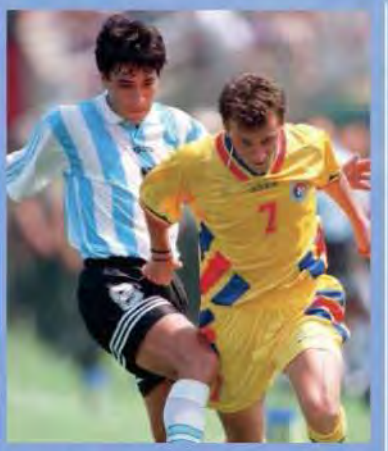
MILAN 4 BARCELONA 0

MAY 18, 1994

Fabio Capello's Milan side didn't just beat Johan Cruyff's much-fancied Barcelona in this Champions League Final, they totally ran rings round them. Two goals from Daniele Massaro and one each from Marcel Desailly and the brilliant Dejan Savicevic secured the victory with half an hour still to play.

Keir Radnedge wrote in the July 1994 edition of *World Soccer*: "If Capello had had his way Savicevic would have been sold off long ago. The exiled Serb, saved only by a one-man fan club in president Silvio Berlusconi, scored one goal and was involved in the other three within a team display of the greatest class."

Out of this world



ROMANIA 3 ARGENTINA 2

JULY 3, 1994

With a disgraced Diego Maradona missing from this World Cup second-round tie, Romania gave Argentina a footballing lesson. Ilie Dumitrescu, who scored twice, and Gheorghe Hagi did the damage with skills more accustomed to South America than eastern Europe.

Romania coach Anghel Iordanescu said after the game: "This is the greatest event celebrated by our people since the revolution. It's also the greatest moment in our soccer history."

ENGLAND 4 HOLLAND 1

JUNE 18, 1996

Many punters regard this Euro 96 group win as England's best-ever performance as they gave the Dutch masters of "total football" a lesson in how the game should be played.

In *World Soccer* August 1996 issue, Keir Radnedge reported: "Two goals each from Alan Shearer and Teddy Sheringham crowned an England team performance which mixed skill, determination and pace in equal measure. Holland played poorly but how much their failure was due to a mixture of their own complacency and internal problems and how much to England's superiority was hard to tell."

NIGERIA 4 BRAZIL 3

JULY 31, 1996

In the Olympic Games semi-final, a Brazil side containing the likes of Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Bebeto and Juninho led 3-1 with just 12 minutes left. However, a Victor Ikpeba goal reduced the arrears before a spectacular last-minute equaliser from Kanu, who scored again in the fourth minute of extra-time with a 20-yard shot to send Nigeria into the final.

JUVENTUS 2 MANCHESTER UNITED 3

APRIL 21, 1999

After a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford, United found themselves two goals down after just 11 minutes in the second leg of the Champions League semi-final in Turin. Cue captain Roy Keane who reduced the deficit with a header on 24 minutes and, despite a booking that would rule him out of the Final, inspired United to victory on the night and a trip to Camp Nou.

World Soccer reported in June 1999 issue: "United brought off one of the most remarkable recoveries in European history. In the second half, Ferguson's skills became more evident. He had preferred the more pragmatic Butt to Scholes in midfield to nullify the threat of Conte and Zidane. Gradually the tide turned in United's favour."

MANCHESTER UNITED 2 BAYERN MUNICH 1

MAY 26, 1999

With 90 minutes on the clock Bayern were looking deserved winners of this somewhat dull Champions League Final. Then it all changed as firstly Teddy Sheringham guided home a Ryan Giggs miss-kick to equalise and, with virtually the last kick of the game, Ole Gunnar Sloskjaer's outstretched boot got on the end of Sheringham's flick-on to win it for United.

Keir Radnedge reported in the July 1999 issue of *World Soccer*: "The European Cup – under whatever name – has produced some great Finals, some thrilling Finals, some engrossing Finals down the years...but never anything as dramatic as this."

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SPAIN 4 YUGOSLAVIA 3

JUNE 21, 2000

In this thrilling final group match at Euro 2000, Yugoslavia led three times, only for Spain to pull level on each occasion until in the final seconds, when Alfonso struck the winner with virtually the last kick of the match.

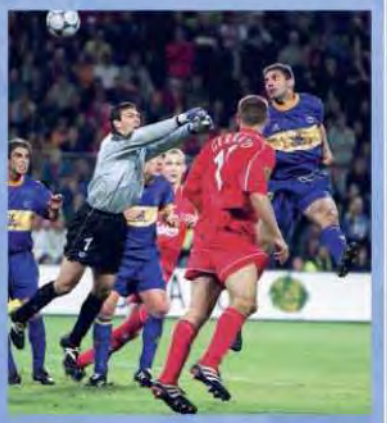
In *World Soccer* July 2000 issue, Gavin Hamilton reported: "Spain looked to be heading out of the competition. Another tournament, another disappointing performance from a team who had promised much, but delivered little. Then just before the lights were turned out on Spain's tournament, they came roaring back to life to pull off one of the most remarkable comebacks seen in international football."

DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA 4 PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN 3

MARCH 7, 2001

A Walter Pandiani hat-trick of headers saw the Spanish champions spring an amazing comeback after trailing 3-0 after 55 minutes of this Champions League second-phase group tie.

World Soccer reported in May 2001: "Javier Irureta had thrown on substitute Pandiani at half-time in a desperate bid to salvage something from the game. Remarkably, Depor scored four goals in 33 minutes, all headers, to send PSG crashing out of the competition."



LIVERPOOL 5 ALAVES 4

MAY 16, 2001

Liverpool led 3-1 at half-time in the UEFA Cup Final in Dortmund, only for the Spanish underdogs to score two quick goals to level. Robbie Fowler put Liverpool ahead again, until two minutes from the end when Jordi Cruyff equalised. But an extra-time own "golden goal" from Alaves' Delfi Geli won it for Liverpool.

Gavin Hamilton reported in the Summer 2001 edition of *World Soccer*: "European finals are not supposed to end like this. They are settled by a single goal here, a moment of individual brilliance there. Not nine goals, a golden goal, extra time and two red cards. So much for the game of chess played out by two cagey teams that had been predicted beforehand. The Final that promised so little, delivered so much – and more."

GERMANY 1 ENGLAND 5

SEPTEMBER 1, 2001

Germany had only ever lost one World Cup qualifier on home soil prior to this encounter in Munich. However their defence capitulated as England scored five goals after falling behind early on. Michael Owen contributed a stunning hat-trick and there was one each for Steven Gerrard and Emile Heskey.

World Soccer reported in its October 2001 issue: "In Munich's Olympiastadion on the night of Saturday, September 1, English football inflicted humiliation on Germany, whose defence crumbled at the lightning-quick feet of Michael Owen."

SOUTH KOREA 2 ITALY 1

JUNE 18, 2002

With three minutes of extra time remaining, Ahn Jung-hwan headed the "golden goal" that sent Italy crashing out of the 2002 World Cup to the joint host nation. It echoed the Italians departure from the 1966 tournament to South Korea's neighbours from the north.

Gavin Hamilton, in Daejon for *World Soccer*, wrote in July 2002: "This was an astonishing result, one to rank alongside that of 1966. Italy, favourites to go all the way to the Final, were powerless to prevent the ghosts of history returning to haunt them."

> "Germany's defence crumbled at the lightning quick feet of Michael Owen"

MANCHESTER UNITED 4 REAL MADRID 3

APRIL 23, 2003

This was Brazilian striker Ronaldo's night and probably his greatest performance as he finished with a hat-trick before being substituted to a standing ovation, only for Madrid-bound David Beckham to come off the bench and win the match, but not the tie, for United.

In *World Soccer* June 2003 issue, Gavin Hamilton wrote: "It was without doubt an extraordinary match, even though the result was never in doubt after Ronaldo had scored the first goal of a devastating hat-trick early in the first half."

PORTO 3 CELTIC 2

MAY 21, MAY 2003

After a slow start to the UEFA Cup Final, Derlei gave Porto a first-half lead, but Celtic came fighting back in a pulsating second half. Twice, Henrik Larsson brought the Bhoys back on level terms to force extra-time. Despite having Bobo Balde sent off, Celtic held firm until five minutes from the end when Derlei scored again.

Keir Radnedge reported in July 2003 issue of *World Soccer*: "(Porto manager) Jose Mourinho was 'euphoric' enough with victory but this was not, he warned, a springboard to Champions League glory. He said: 'We can do nice things in the Champions League next season but I don't think we can win it. Winning it is for the sharks, the clubs who can afford to spend 40million euros on one player.' At least Porto proved there are other fish in the sea."

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MONACO 8 DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA 3

NOVEMBER 5, 2003

Four goals from Dado Prso on his 29th birthday helped set a Champions League record for the highest number of goals in a single game.

After the match, Monaco coach Didier Deschamps was quoted in the December 2003 edition of *World Soccer*: "It's difficult to grasp. It's an extraordinary moment to beat a side like Deportivo 8-3 in the Champions League. Unthinkable."

DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA 4 MILAN 0

APRIL 7, 2004

Despite conceding eight goals in a Champions League group game against Monaco and trailing holders Milan 4-1 after the first leg of this quarter-final, the Spanish club pulled off one of the most amazing comebacks to win the return leg 4-0. By half-time they had levelled the score on aggregate and led on away goals. Fran secured the outright win with a goal in the 76th minute.

CZECH REPUBLIC 3 HOLLAND 2

JUNE 19, 2004

Czech Republic came from two goals down after 19 minutes to win this Euro 2004 group game. It was attacking football at its best, played by both sides.

Gavin Hamilton wrote in *World Soccer* August 2004 issue: "An extraordinary match. A thrilling, pulsating, adrenaline-fuelled goalfest that drained the emotions and left the privileged 29,935 crowd wanting more. For the Czech Republic, who roared back from 2-0 down to triumph, there was the reward of a place in the quarter-finals. For Holland, there was the small consolation of knowing they had participated in one of the most remarkable matches in the history of the European Championship."

LIVERPOOL 3 MILAN 3

(LIVERPOOL 3-2 ON PENS)
MAY 25, 2005

Liverpool looked dead and buried when they conceded three first-half goals to Milan in the Champions League Final in Istanbul. However, within 15 crazy minutes of the restart they were on level terms. Liverpool goalkeeper Dudek then produced a fine double save from Shevchenko to send the game to penalties, where he thwarted Shevchenko once again.

In *World Soccer* July 2005 issue, Keir Radnedge wrote: "This was not so much a match of two halves as a match of two days. Kick-off was at 9.45pm local time. Andriy Shevchenko's lacklustre concluding penalty was saved by Jerzy Dudek way past midnight. Thus, on May 25 Milan had it won but come May 26 they had lost it."

> "On May 25 Milan had it won but come May 26 they had lost it"

The wonder of Istanbul

ARGENTINA 6 SERBIA & MONTENEGRO 0

JUNE 16, 2006

A dazzling display by Argentina in this World Cup group game in Gelsenkirchen saw them score six times without reply as newcomers Serbia & Montenegro were totally outclassed. The highlight of the game was Argentina's second goal – scored by Esteban Cambiasso but made by the rest of the team with a move that included 24 passes.

In July 2006 issue of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "Superlatives bounced up around the closed roof of Schalke stadium after Argentina produced their finest World Cup display since 1986. Juan Roman Riquelme directed the orchestra deftly in midfield and collected the man of the match award. But that could have gone to many other of his team-mates."

GERMANY 0 ITALY 2

JULY 4, 2006

This World Cup semi-final was on course to being one of the greatest goalless draws ever played.

As penalties loomed, Gavin Hamilton, who was in Dortmund for the game, takes up the story in the July 2006 issue of *World Soccer*: "Italy pressed on, sensing how tough a shoot-out would be with so much of the crowd against them. They also knew history was against them – they had lost on penalties in three out of the last four World Cups. The reward was goals of the highest quality. Fabio Grosso's curler was worthy of deciding such a memorable match. Alessandro Del Piero's flick was the culmination of a masterful counter-attack."

CHELSEA 4 LIVERPOOL 4

APRIL 14, 2009

It looked as if Chelsea were home and dry after winning the first-leg tie of this Champions League quarter-final at Anfield 3-1. But Liverpool had other ideas. Goals from Fabio Aurelio and Xabi Alonso brought the Reds level on aggregate. However, Chelsea hit back with goals from Didier Drogba, Alex and Frank Lampard to take a 3-2 lead on the night and 6-3 on aggregate. Liverpool weren't finished though as two goals in a minute reduced the aggregate arrears to 6-5 in Chelsea's favour. One more goal from the visitors would see them through on away goals, but Lampard made it safe with a shot that cannoned off both posts and saw Chelsea into the semi-finals. ●

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Secret weapons

With the World Cup less than 10 weeks away, we turn the spotlight on the unsung heroes, surprise packages and relative unknowns who could make all the difference in South Africa

Matthew Amoah
Ghana

Amoah could not argue with the fact that he has had a journeyman career at club level, wasting his only break when Borussia Dortmund took him briefly from the Dutch league. He could point to endless injury problems, and his diminutive frame has meant his impact as a striker has been muted, but within the Ghana set-up he carries a confidence that comes from a decade of international experience that may allow him to flourish on the World Cup stage.

Valter Birsa
Slovenia

Buoyed by his good work this season for surprise Ligue 1 title candidates Auxerre, the attacking all-rounder is not particularly known beyond his homeland and France. Expect the goods to be unwrapped in South Africa.

Albert Bunjaku
Switzerland

With veteran striker Alex Frei arguably past his prime, not to mention injury prone, Switzerland coach Ottmar Hitzfeld could turn to Kosovo-born Bunjaku, who has been regularly on the scoresheet this season for Nurnberg in the Bundesliga.

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Denis Caniza
Paraguay

The last survivor from the team that gave France such a fright in 1998, Caniza was ever present through Paraguay's three consecutive World Cups – but almost never in his favoured centre-back position, for which he is too small at the highest level. He has stiffened up the midfield, but has more often been seen at full-back or wing-back. Approaching 36 and in the Mexican second division, he is no longer a regular starter, but could still be an important squad member.

Choe Myong-ho
North Korea

Described as the "North Korean Cristiano Ronaldo", this quicksilver attacker and former Asian young player of the year (2005) could be his nation's wild card. Now back home after failing to impress in the Russian league with Krylia Sovetov Samara.

Nigel De Jong
Holland

Not nearly so arrogant as he once was, the Manchester City defensive midfielder allows the *Oranje* creators to do their thing. De Jong also provides an insurance policy against fire and theft at the back.

Jay DeMerit
USA

Despite spending most of his career in the English second tier with Watford, the battle-hardened central defender has the knack of rising to the superior challenge of the international game.

Antonio Candreva
Italy

ON HIS FIRST DAY of training with Marcello Lippi's Italy squad in November, midfielder Antonio Candreva was in for a big surprise when he was told he would be playing in the friendly against Holland the following evening.

Lippi told the 22-year-old to "keep calm", adding that if he had called him up it was for a good reason and not just to make up the numbers. In other words, play your cards right and you could be going to South Africa.

Speaking after that game, which ended goalless, Lippi told TV viewers that Candreva could be a player who will be around the national team for some long time. Lippi underlined the point by picking Candreva for his second cap four days later against Sweden – a game that Italy won 1-0.

On his trail

At the beginning of this season, Candreva was hardly a household name. Indeed, perhaps the only fans who could claim to know him well were those at Livorno, where he played a big role in their promotion-winning season in Serie B last year. After his performance against Holland, however, big clubs such as Chelsea and Inter were allegedly on his trail.

Not surprisingly, he proved to be one of the more interesting movers in the January transfer market, joining Juventus on a loan deal (from Udinese, who had loaned him to Livorno) with a price tag of £6million on his head. Given Lippi's past links with Juve – and given that many think he had a role last summer in persuading Juventus to purchase two of his World Cup winners, in Fabio Cannavaro and Fabio Grosso – there are those who believe the national coach was behind the deal. Not that Juventus needed to ring up Lippi to hear his opinion of the player – he had already made that all too clear and very publicly.

It would be nice to say that, since then, everything has worked out...but that's not quite true. As Juventus crashed out of both the *scudetto* contest and the Europa League, beaten 4-1 by Roy Hodgson's Fulham, Candreva has not convinced everyone. There have even been those who suggest that he is really not Juventus "officer" material.

In truth, as we all know, when a team is playing badly, it is almost impossible for a newcomer to make a telling impact. Lippi knows this as well, if not better than most, and is likely to stick with a player who combines work rate with an "educated" right foot.

"Not for nothing is Mauro Camoranesi worried about his place"

Not for nothing is Mauro Camoranesi reportedly worried that he may lose not only his club spot but also his national team place to the Roma-born youngster.

Time will tell but it seems more than probable that Candreva will be on the plane to South Africa. The player himself is certainly hopeful, saying: "I hope to go to South Africa, that's only normal once you've been called into the national squad. But I've got to keep playing well in Serie A, not just for one day but from here to May."

Paddy Agnew

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Abou Diaby
France

If the Arsenal midfielder stays fit – and that's a big "if" – he could be the answer to his country's lack of dynamism in central midfield, where Jeremy Toulalan and Lassana Diarra are rather pedestrian.

Jan Durica
Slovakia

After breaking a metatarsal in his right-foot, Liverpool centre-back Martin Skrtel faces a race against time to be fit for the big kick-off. But even if he does not make it, his partner at the heart of the Slovakia back-four is bound to stand firm.

Eduardo
Portugal

The Sporting Braga goalkeeper has proved a most reliable successor to Ricardo and has the same knack of saving penalties.

Carlos Carmona
Chile

PRAISE HAS flooded in for coach Marcelo Bielsa for leading Chile to the World Cup finals in such convincing and attractive style – and rightly so. The Argentinian has clearly done an exceptional job, inheriting a squad in some disarray following the 2007 Copa America and moulding them into a side considered by some to be dark horses in South Africa.

Perhaps it was a good time to take over as the raw material was there, for while Chile's senior side, under Nelson Acosta, were falling apart in that Copa America, the Under-20s were in Canada on their way to third place in the World Youth Cup. This was excellent news for Bielsa, whose commitment to high tempo, attacking football needs young legs to put it into practice. Several of that Under-20 side have progressed into the World Cup line-up – and if not the most eye catching, one of the most important is midfielder Carmona.

A regular member of the first-team line-up of Coquimbo, his hometown club, at the age of 18, Carmona featured in the World Youth Cups of 2005 and 2007. Together with some of his colleagues from the latter, he went to the Toulon youth tournament of 2008 which is where, with time to work with his players, it all came together for Bielsa's Chile. His team were never really at their best during the World Cup qualification campaign, but after Toulon he was ready to make the generational change. For the next round of qualifiers, the fifth, Carmona was introduced, along with fellow 2007 graduates Alexis Sanchez and Gary Medel. All came in and stayed in.

Carmona has usually filled the vital central midfield role in Bielsa's 3-3-1-3 formation, though he has also operated on the right and can play in a number of positions. What he brings to them all is lung power and aggressive tackling, the very type of dynamism that Bielsa's system requires if the ball is to be won as far up the pitch as possible. It is this extra athleticism that has given Carmona the nod over the classy Claudio Maldonado, his closest rival for the defensive midfield position.

Historic win

So far, the results speak for themselves. Carmona played in 11 rounds of the qualification campaign. There were three defeats: home and away to Brazil, and at altitude in Ecuador. But he took part in six victories, including a historic win over Argentina and an excellent one away to Paraguay.

The downside is the disciplinary consequence of his enthusiastic tackling. Now in his second season with Reggina in Italy, Carmona has picked up three separate suspensions during the campaign, accumulating six yellow cards. If the criteria in South Africa is as strict as it was in last year's Confederations Cup then he is a prime candidate for cautions in June and July.

There will be plenty of nerves around the Chile camp when they open their World Cup campaign against Honduras. Even more than the other young graduates of 2007, Carmona will need to ensure that he controls his aggression.

Tim Vickery

"His extra athleticism has given him the nod over the classy Maldonado"

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Gilberto Silva
Brazil

NEARING 34 and surely on the downward slope, Gilberto Silva prepares for his third World Cup – but the first in which he is guaranteed a place in the starting line-up.

In 2002 he was a squad player with a handful of caps, only recently converted from centre-back to defensive midfielder, when on the eve of the tournament Emerson injured himself in a training-ground kickabout and Gilberto had to step in.

Four years later he was Emerson's reserve again, but did well off the bench and started the quarter-final against France. The nature of the defeat, and the way Zinedine Zidane tore apart the Brazilian midfield, might have entitled him to believe his time in the *Selecao* had come to an end.

When new coach Dunga continued to call him up, it was widely seen as a short-term measure, the selection of a wise and stabilising influence to ease the introduction of a fresh generation ...instead of which, his international career was only getting started. Over half his 84 caps have come after his 30th birthday and he has become a symbol of the Dunga regime: much criticised but always defended by the coach – and always selected.

Purists are upset such a key position is filled by a converted centre-back with limited distribution skills as his passing is usually slow and to the side.

Arsenal fans, too, may well be surprised that their former player is still such a fixture in his national team. So effective for years, the evidence of his last season in London was of a man past his best, unable to accompany the pass-and-move game of Cesc Fabregas and vulnerable when drawn into open spaces.

Gilberto's response is that he was not given enough games to play himself into form. And, pressed on the subject, Dunga goes on the attack. Arsenal, he says, have become a *timeco* (poor, insignificant team) since their former player left for Panathinaikos.

Different philosophies

At the heart of the debate are different philosophies. Dunga's Brazil are not seeking to win aesthetic approval for intricate midfield interplay; they are more concerned with launching the counter. They sit deep, with defence and midfield close together, drawing opponents forward. Both Gilberto Silva and Felipe Melo have the height and strength to form a tight midfield barrier, and with his defensive awareness the former is expected to organise those around him – at times slot into the back line to free right-back Maicon to bomb forward.

In his first four internationals Gilberto Silva managed three goals, all in pre-2002 World Cup warm-up friendlies. Although a threat from set-pieces there have been none since and he has gone 80 games without a goal, surely a record for a Brazil midfielder.

But as long as Brazil win the World Cup, Gilberto Silva will not mind if he fails to add to the total or even if he is hardly noticed. He will keep plodding on with customary quiet determination.

Tim Vickery

Amado Guevara
Honduras

A playmaker of no little skill and vision, as well as the natural-born leader of the Honduran revolution, *El Lobo* (the wolf) is the man for all Central American seasons who does not receive his due in praise.

Javier Hernandez
Mexico

This quick-witted young Guadalajara attacker has been lobbying hard for a starting spot for Mexico with goalscoring performances in springtime warm-up games. His father, Chicharo, played for the national team at the 1986 World Cup.

Kader Keita
Ivory Coast

Anyone who saw his goal against Algeria in the African Nations Cup will attest to Keita's ability. Once Africa's most expensive player, he is behind Didier Drogba and Salomon Kalou in the Ivorian pecking order but is likely to have a role as an impact player.

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Chris Killen
New Zealand

While Shane Smeltz took most of the Kiwi goalscoring honours en route to South Africa, he was undoubtedly aided by the battering ram style of strike partner Killen. Not pretty, but pretty effective.

Kim Jae-sung
South Korea

An explosive and combative young wide midfielder who would not have looked out of place in Guus Hiddink's perpetual-motion South Korea side that played in the 2002 finals. Has been a revelation in recent friendlies.

Juan Mata
Spain

The brilliant Valencia left-winger is one of the few additions to Spain's Euro 2008-winning squad and is sure to bring virtuosity and imagination if and when he comes off the bench.

Keisuke Honda
Japan

DISPLAYING PERFECT timing, CSKA Moscow's creative midfielder has every chance of overtaking the pack and establishing himself as Japan's silver dream machine at the World Cup.

At the same time as the star of long-serving Japan playmaker Shunsuke Nakamura has begun to wane – his move last summer from Celtic to Espanyol in Spain turned out to be a fiasco and within six months he was back at his J.League first love, Yokohama F.Marinos – 23-year-old Honda is operating at full throttle with each passing week and Blue Samurai coach Takeshi Okada is coming under more and more pressure to accept the changing of the guard.

Okada must be brave, unsentimental and prepared to eat a large portion of humble pie. He only picked Honda for two World Cup 2010 qualifiers and the danger is he will dig in his heels, fearful of upsetting the iconic Nakamura.

Ultimately, however, Okada will have to find room for Honda. He is very much the man in form and Japan are screaming out for his match-winning capabilities, his rocket shot, his quick feet and his ability to cut in from either flank.

Ever since leaving Nagoya Grampus Eight early in 2008 for unfashionable Dutch side VVV Venlo, Honda has been on an irresistible upward course. At VVV, who he inspired to promotion to the Eredivisie last term, his flair-laced approach play and magical prowess from free-kicks led to fans dubbing him "Keizer Keisuke".

Since moving to Moscow, in January in an £8million deal, he has proved equally prominent, especially in the recent Champions League second-round victory in Sevilla, when he made one and scored another to secure a quarter-final place.

Too egotistical

An oft-heard complaint about Honda in Japan is he is too egotistical and not the most assiduous of team players. But on the evidence of his energetic and gutsy performances for Venlo and CSKA, the tag of temperamental diva is wide of the mark.

"The difference between Japanese and European football is simple," says Honda, who made his national team debut in a World Cup tie against Bahrain in June 2008. "In Japan they tell me to defend, but in Europe I'm told to shoot more."

Over to you, Mr Okada.

Nick Bidwell

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Toni Kroos
Germany

FOLLOWING IN the footsteps of Stuttgart No10 Hansi Muller in 1978, Bayern Munich centre-back Norbert Eder in 1986 and Dortmund winger David Odonkor four years ago, Bayer Leverkusen's highly-rated midfield starlet looks an exceedingly good bet to be the latest German footballer to force his way into the *Nationalmannschaft* reckoning on the eve of a World Cup finals.

Kroos, who made his debut in March as a substitute in the friendly defeat by Argentina in Munich, certainly deserved his elevation to the full-international arena.

Loaned out this season by Bayern Munich to Leverkusen, the left-sided or central playmaker has few equals when it comes to creativity, and if his club have taken root in the upper echelons of this season's Bundesliga, it is in no small part thanks to the precision of his passing, shooting and expertise at set-pieces.

"We'd been talking about him for a couple of years before giving him a chance with the full squad," declared Germany coach Joachim Low recently. "There was never any doubt that here was a youngster of enormous talent. He was not playing so often for Bayern, so the move to Leverkusen really was the right way for him to go.

"It goes without saying that he's only at the start of his development and that he can achieve much, much more."

Only just turned 20, Kroos should not simply go to South Africa as part of a "watch, listen and learn" exercise. Germany do not exactly have a surfeit of guile and finesse in their ranks, and with attacking-third starters such as Mesut Ozil and Lukas Podolski struggling for top form of late, he could be a most credible alternative.

Another year

"It wouldn't be normal if I didn't want to go to a World Cup," says Kroos, who theoretically is supposed to be returning to Bayern this summer, though there are rumours that he would not say no to extending his time at Leverkusen by another year.

Voted best player at the Under-17 World Championship of 2007, has more than one new frontier to cross.

Nick Bidwell

"There was never any doubt that here was a youngster of enormous talent"

Karim Matmour
Algeria

The thrusting right-winger might not be an automatic choice for German club Borussia Monchengladbach, but his vim and effervescence constitute a major part of the offensive plans of the north Africans.

James Milner
England

In form for Aston Villa and one of the most improved players in the Premier League. His ability to play in several positions (central midfield, on the right wing or even full-back) makes him a godsend for Fabio Capello.

Katlego Mphela
South Africa

Top scorer in South Africa's domestic league, but in something of a drought recently. However, a little spark on the eve of the World Cup could make him the foil if Benni McCarthy and Bernard Parker do not produce the goods.

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Tommy Oar
Australia

The Socceroos are not over-endowed with attacking weapons and the 18-year-old from Brisbane Roar certainly looked the part on his international debut against Indonesia.

Chinedu Obasi
Nigeria

Blisteringly quick on the right of the attack, Nigeria did not discover his potential until halfway through the qualifying campaign. Obasi was selected almost as an afterthought for the recent African Nations Cup in Angola but responded by making the starting line-up for the first game and netted the Super Eagles' first goal. He was also part of Hoffenheim's superlative first season in the Bundesliga last year.

Alvaro Pereira
Uruguay

A surprise choice when plucked from Romanian football and sent into the second half of the qualification campaign, Pereira proved to be an inspired hunch from coach Oscar Tabarez. His lung power and left foot have come in useful all along that flank – in midfield, at wing-back or as a conventional full back. In the impressive 3-1 win away to Switzerland he was the team's escape valve, underlining his importance to the World Cup campaign. Now in Portugal with Porto.

Stephane Mbia
Cameroon

IN ORDER to live up to their nickname of the Indomitable Lions this summer, Cameroon must learn not to press the defensive self-destruct button in moments of high anxiety – and Marseille's Mbia could well turn out to be the key man in this particular self-help project.

The only question is where the 23-year-old will play: in his usual midfield holding role or in central defence, the position he was switched to a few months ago by OM boss Didier Deschamps and where he has looked a complete and utter natural?

No doubt shaken by the porous state of his rearguard at January's African Nations Cup, Cameroon coach Paul Le Guen may be tempted to go with the second option. A centre-back pairing of Mbia and veteran Rigobert Song has a solid look, while the west Africans already have more than enough good midfield enforcers in the shape of Lyon's Jean Makoun, Alex Song of Arsenal and Eyong Enoh of Ajax.

Ill at ease

Just one problem, though. Mbia hates his new brief and has no qualms about making it known, having said: "I can't express myself as a centre-back. I admit it's not so apparent but I feel ill at ease there. I want to return to my old spot in central midfield as soon as possible."

Will Le Guen prove as intransigent in this matter as Deschamps, who said: "If he doesn't want to play at centre-back for OM, I'll find him a place on the bench"? The likelihood is not.

Le Guen needs everyone pulling together, not an outbreak of player power.

But whatever his instructions in South Africa, Mbia will be relying on the same core qualities: the physical presence, athleticism, love of combat and strength in the air – all of which once had Premier League sides Manchester City and Everton on his trail, and which persuaded Marseille to pay Rennes £12million for him at the start of the season.

"Despite going out in the quarter-finals of this year's African championship, I'm sure we'll be a force in South Africa," says Mbia. "We have become more consistent under Paul Le Guen. He's a rigorous and demanding coach and brought us back from the dead after a terrible start to World Cup qualification.

"I'll go as far as to predict that an African nation will win this World Cup. On our own continent, the fervour generated by African fans will galvanise us all while swamping the others."

Nick Bidwell

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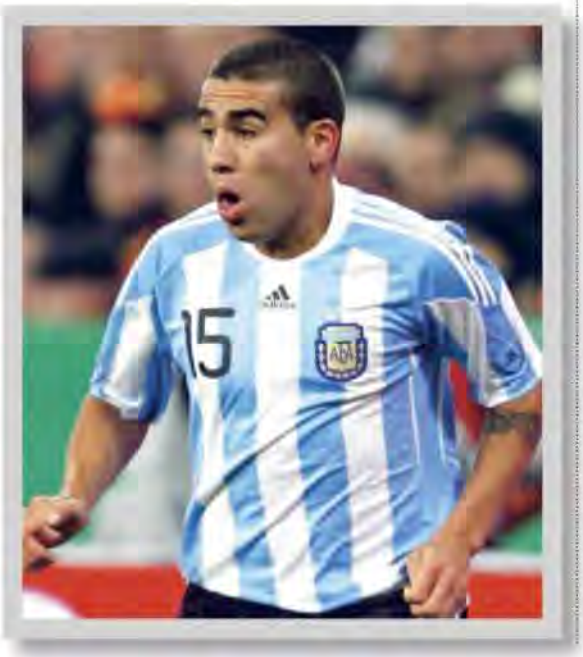
Nicolas Otamendi
Argentina

PERHAPS THE biggest symbol of Diego Maradona's time in charge of Argentina is defender Nicolas Otamendi...for two main reasons.

First, because Maradona has made a point of playing friendlies with a squad solely made up of home-based players. Otamendi featured in the first of them, against Panama in May of last year, and was soon plunged straight into the tumultuous World Cup qualification campaign.

At the time of his national debut, Otamendi had played little more than a handful of games for Velez Sarsfield, the Buenos Aires club whose youth ranks he scaled. He was the sensation of the 2009 clausura in the first half of the year, when an injury to Chilean Waldo Ponce meant Otamendi was promoted to the first team for the third match of the campaign. He looked instantly at home, so neat and full of classy interceptions that he stayed for the duration as Velez lifted the title. He was also named centre-back of the championship.

Which brings us to the other reason for naming him as a symbol of Maradona's side. On the evidence of the 1-0 win in Germany at the start of March, Otamendi has a strong chance of featuring in Argentina's starting line-up in the World Cup. But not in his natural position. He could be at right-back in a defensive line that, along with Martin Demichelis, Walter Samuel and Gabriel Heinze, essentially consists of four centre-backs.



One-off measure

This arrangement was first used against Uruguay in the last round of World Cup qualification. It looked then like a one-off measure, designed to keep out an opponent with dangerous strikers but little midfield elaboration in a match where a draw was good enough.

But the evidence of the Germany game – in which goalkeeper Sergio Romero had just one shot to save – is this has become Maradona's plan for South Africa. At Barcelona, Lionel Messi has Dani Alves opening up the pitch from right-back; for the national team he has a converted centre-back.

This might well be tough on Otamendi. He has little vocation for pushing forward down the flank and, at 22, remains a player of limited experience. Even in his true centre-back role he found domestic football to World Cup qualification a huge step up. On his debut against Ecuador he nearly gave away a goal with his first touch. Brazil gave Otamendi a lesson on life at the top table, scoring their clinching goal with a delicious Kaka pass inside him for Luis Fabiano. In December he had problems in the air and on the ground as Argentina's defence caved in against Catalonia.

It was harsh on a very promising player thrown in at the deep end and the World Cup will be a stiffer test. "My game is anticipation," he says. "I like to read the action and go to snuff out the danger." He does it very well, but at right-back he will face wingers running at him, which could expose a tendency to go to ground too much.

His coach seems pleased enough, though. "Otamendi had a great game," said Maradona after the final whistle against Germany. "I'm happy with the defence. We kept a clean sheet and that was what was worrying me."

Otamendi will try to ensure that Maradona can puff on his cigars with similar tranquillity in South Africa.

Tim Vickery

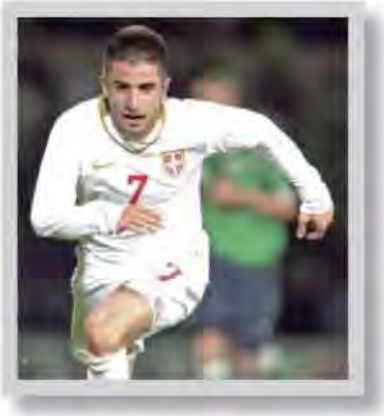
"Playing at right-back could expose his tendency to go to ground too much"

Jakob Poulsen
Denmark

Wholehearted and quick to spot impending danger, he provides the ballast in the Danish midfield and is no slouch going forward either, as shown by his winner against Sweden in the qualifiers. The personification of a no-frills, no-name side.

Dimitris Salpigidis
Greece

No player in the Hellenic side competes with as much intensity as the striker or right-winger, and as both a starter or substitute he generally makes a difference. See his winner away to Ukraine in the 2010 play-offs.



Zoran Tosic
Serbia

The word in Belgrade is that the young winger will be the favourite impact player of coach Radomir Antic in South Africa. He is on loan at Koln from Manchester United.

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SOUTH AFRICA

Steven Pienaar

Midfielder is confident home support can see the hosts through

Talisman...Pienaar is his side's most recognisable name

THE slight frame of Steven Pienaar will carry an enormous burden of expectation for South Africa this summer as arguably the World Cup hosts' only established international star.

A stellar season in England with Premier League side Everton has made the 28-year-old from Johannesburg one of the few recognisable names in an underperforming national team. He is also one of the few with the requisite international experience – a factor coach Carlos Alberto Parreira believes will be key to his side's chances of emerging out of the group phase and avoiding the ignominy of being the first host nation to fail to make it past the first round.

Pienaar was in South Africa's squad at their last World Cup, in 2002, but was deemed too young and too physically weak to get a game. However, his physical appearance is deceptive and his hard-running has now won him more than his share of admirers.

Not filly fit at last year's Confederations Cup, he still proved a talisman for Bafana Bafana and his absence from more recent internationals, mostly because of injury, has shown how reliant the team is on his skill and work rate.

Of the four South Africa internationals in the Premier League, Pienaar is the only one guaranteed a regular starting place and his exploits are keenly followed in his home country, where there is saturation coverage of English football.

He is also one of the few who took a positive view of a draw that pitted South Africa against two former world champions (France and Uruguay) and also has them starting against a tricky Mexico side on June 11.

"I was at Goodison Park doing a signing session for Everton fans when the draw was on and we stole away to a room on the side to watch," he says. "When Mexico came out I thought, 'That's good, we will beat them', and with Uruguay I was pretty pleased too.

"France are tough, but Ireland showed that they can be fragile and I believe we are equally as good as the Irish. It is that first game that is so important. If we can get three points against Mexico I am convinced we will qualify for the second round. We have beaten them before, so why should we not do it again?"

> **"I have said all along this team has the ability to surprise people"**

Pienaar says there is value in being an underdog but that any unexpected progress will have to come in tandem with a fanatical and fevered home support.

"I think it is good for us that they [the experts] write us off," he adds. "From a player's point of view, this will make us even more determined to prove the critics wrong and probably, in a way, make us more relaxed.

"Results have been bad of late, there is no denying that, but I have said all along that this team has the ability to surprise people, and when we read the negative headlines it just makes us more determined to do well.

"If the crowd can get behind us, which I believe they will just because of the enthusiasm they will show for the tournament, then that can be a real boost for us. It definitely adds something.

"I don't know the science behind it, but you look at any team in any sport and they generally win more games at home than away."

Mark Gleeson

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SIX OF THE BEST SURPRISE

Aritz ADURIZ

MALLORCA

MALLORCA fans who spent the summer of 2008 fretting following the sale of top striker Dani Guiza to Fenerbahce need not have worried. The Balearic Islanders soon found themselves a fine replacement in ex-Athletic Bilbao front man Aduriz, whose finishing, physical presence and spirit have done so much to sustain the Mallorcans' challenge for European qualification this season.

A product of Athletic's youth scheme, the 29-year-old from San Sebastian attracts most attention for putting the ball in the net – he was Mallorca's leading scorer last term with 11 Liga goals and looks certain to do even better this time – but his all-round game is excellent too. One moment he is displaying the aerial power and strength of an English-style target man; the next he's appearing in the guise of a second striker, effectively linking the play and pulling into wide areas.

No wonder so many of the Athletic Bilbao persuasion remain resentful that he was allowed to leave.

Karim AIT-FANA

MONTPELLIER

NOT surprisingly for someone who spent six years in charge of France's junior and under-21 sides, Montpellier coach Rene Girard has made a point of cramming home-grown youth into his first team. And of the half-dozen tyros who have done so much to magically turn the promoted club into elite title chasers, ebullient left-winger Ait-Fana is the crème de la crème.

All season long – his first in the Gallic top flight – the 21-year-old's sophisticated ball skills, speed off the mark and rare creativity have illuminated the Ligue 1 scene; as have spectacular goals, such as the magnificent lob against Le Mans and the waltz through the Marseille defence. Many are comparing him to a certain Franck Ribery – and that's not simply the hype machine cranking up.

Born in Limoges to Moroccan parents, he made his debut for France Under-21s last autumn and, despite North African enquiries as to his senior international plans, he looks set to stay true to *Les Bleus*.

Limoges is known for its porcelain and Ait-Fana is starting to look equally valuable.

Davide CHIUMIENTO

LUCERNE

IF Lucerne are enjoying their best season in the Swiss League for some time, much of the credit belongs to classy 25-year-old attacking midfielder Chiumiento, who is now fulfilling the potential which persuaded Juventus to snatch him away from St Gallen as a teenager.

Of dual Swiss-Italian nationality, he made one Serie A and one Champions League appearance for the Turin club before moving further to the fringes during spells on loan at Siena, Le Mans in France and Young Boys of Bern. But just when it seemed as though the golden child had turned into a base metal adult, a permanent transfer to Lucerne in 2007 slowly but surely reinvigorated him, and his first full cap for Switzerland, in a friendly with Uruguay in February, sealed his great leap forward.

It was a quite a volte-face as, even when playing for Switzerland Under-21s a few years ago, he always insisted his ultimate goal was to be part of the senior Italy set-up.

Out of contract at the end of the current season, he looks almost certain to leave for foreign climes.

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PACKAGES

Nick Bidwell on the unexpected stars in Europe this season

Bas DOST

HERACLES

IT must only be a matter of time before one of Holland's big three swoop for towering Under-21 international Dost, who has caught the eye with his goals this season for the high-flying provincials from Almelo and the confident way he has led their excellent three-man front line which also features Darl Douglas and Everton.

Never before have Heracles finished high enough in the Eredivisie to warrant a place in Europe, but with coach Gertjan Verbeek calling the shots, the team forming a tight brotherhood and Dost able to wound with either bludgeon or rapier, they have an outside chance of ending up in dream land.

Dost, who joined Heracles in the summer of 2008 from second division Emmen, and who abandoned his economic studies to concentrate on his football career, has made rapid progress over the course of the current campaign. He scored only three goals last term and puts his improvement down to greater mental strength and becoming more collective in his approach.

Abel HERNANDEZ

PALERMO

ALTHOUGH THE young Uruguayan tends not to start for his Sicilian club – compatriot Edinson Cavani and club skipper Fabrizio Miccoli have a lock on the two striking berths – Hernandez has proved anything but a peripheral figure these past few months, regularly appearing from the bench to energise not only his side's match day fortunes but also the dreams of indomitable Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini, whose quest for a Champions League spot could, at long last, be realised.

Bought from top Montevideo outfit Penarol in January 2009, the rangy attacker's explosive acceleration, vitality, good left foot and sheer unpredictability make him the ideal impact player: incredibly effective in short, sharp bursts. However, the 19-year-old admits he would love to be used more extensively – and, just to prove the point, was on the scoresheet twice when starting in the 3-0 destruction of Fiorentina early this year.

During his time at Penarol, he was diagnosed with a heart condition but he has been allowed to resume.

Marcio MOSSORO

SPORTING BRAGA

EVEN though attacking midfielder Hugo Viana, Cameroon striker Albert Meyong and goalkeeper Eduardo have made huge contributions to Braga's persistent challenge for their first-ever Portuguese league title, no one has been more influential this season than the 26-year-old Brazilian playmaker.

Short, highly skilled and irrepressible when in full flow, Mossoro is, to all intents and purposes, Braga's answer to Deco; the strategist who sets the tone of their attacking play with his short, snappy passes and peerless decision making.

A member of the Internacional side that won the Libertadores Cup in 2006, he subsequently joined Madeiran side Maritimo on loan before signing a four-year deal with Braga in 2008.

In February he was handed a three-match ban for his part in the fracas which marred Braga's 2-0 victory over Benfica last autumn after being found guilty of an act of aggression towards opposition striker Oscar Cardozo.

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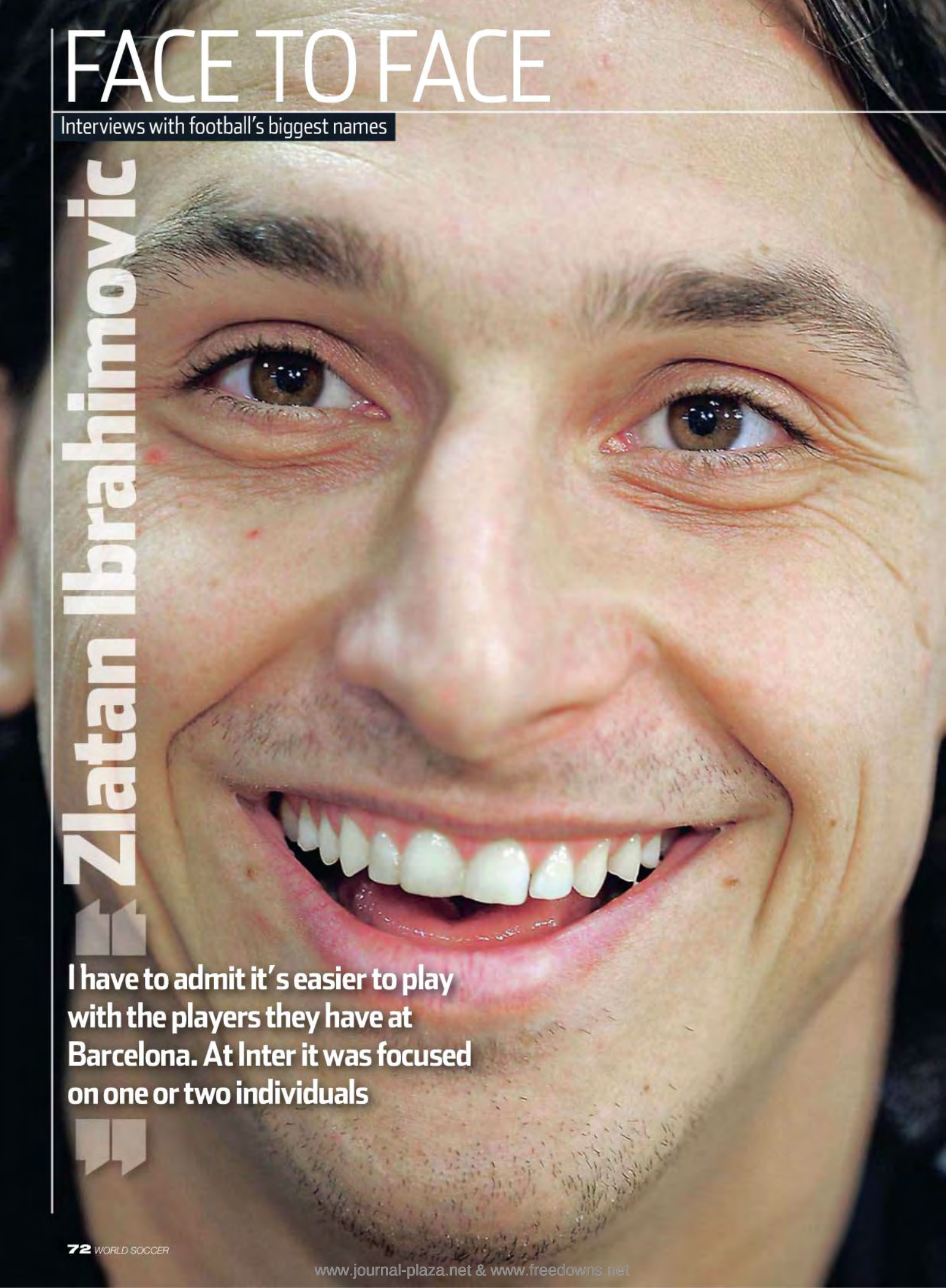
FACE TO FACE

Interviews with football's biggest names

Zlatan Ibrahimovic



I have to admit it's easier to play with the players they have at Barcelona. At Inter it was focused on one or two individuals

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Zlatan Ibrahimovic

Barcelona's record signing on his new life in Spain

Zlatan's **world**

What are the main differences you've noticed between the Italian and Spanish leagues?
There are big differences. In Spain the play is more offensive; in Italy, they put more emphasis on tactics. In Italy not conceding goals is very important. If you score one, it's game over. Here you can score three or four goals a game, it's different. It's not that in Spain they don't like tactics, but in Italy they have a special role. That said, at Barcelona we do a lot of tactical work thanks to the coach, and our tactics always change depending on who we play.

That's a little surprising, as Barcelona always seem to play the same way.
It's little details that change, maybe it's not so noticeable, but there are always changes.

How hard was it for you to adapt? You got off to a flying start, scoring goals, but then they seemed to dry up...
At the beginning I scored several goals, yes. I was a new member of a team already in form, but I wasn't playing like I can. Right now I'm not in my best shape, but I work every day to get there, to master Barcelona's way of playing, to learn more about how to play in the Spanish league. There are still things I have to learn on that front.

More generally, what parts of your game do you think you need to improve?
Everybody says to me: "If you score, that's already enough." But I'm not like that, I don't get any satisfaction that way. I want to use all my qualities. Football is not just about scoring goals. I believe it's much more than that.

It has been suggested that you're a better fit for Barcelona than Samuel Eto'o, precisely because you're not just about the goals, and they wanted something different.
Definitely! When I look at Eto'o, I don't see the same kind of player as me. He's more about scoring and I'm, let's say, more about the whole game. He's a fantastic attacker, with a great goal ratio, and I'm glad to see him doing so well at Inter.

How would you describe your relationship with Jose Mourinho at Inter?
(Long pause) He's...very organised. He demands everything from his players, but I never had many problems with him. Sometimes we had the odd disagreement, but that's normal between a coach and a player. Mourinho's personality has helped him win a lot of titles. He's a winner.

At Inter, the team was set up around you. At Barca, you have players like Xavi and Iniesta pulling the strings, and Messi up front, so you're no longer the key piece in the puzzle. How do you feel about that?
Yes, what you say is true, but I expected it to be different because here we have many players who are brilliant on the ball. At Inter it wasn't like that, although they also have some great players. Comparisons aren't that helpful and both teams are very successful. But I have to admit that it's easier to play with players like Barcelona's – with Xavi, Iniesta, Leo, Henry – because if they're on form, they help me a lot. When the play is divided between many players, it's easier than when it's focused on one or two individuals, as was the case at Inter.

Given that Barca have so many stars, do you feel under the same pressure as you did at Inter?
Yes, you must win here, just as at Inter. The pressure will always be there.

You've already scored the winner in a Barcelona-Real Madrid *clasico*. How does that compare to scoring in the Milan derby?
Any time you score a goal it's a special feeling. What changes is the atmosphere. The game against Real Madrid was fantastic. It was, as they say here "the classic of the year" because both teams are playing for the league title every time they face each other. The derby atmosphere is amazing and when you score everything explodes. And you know the whole country is watching the match. We still have to go to Madrid so I am looking forward to more of the same.

More generally, how does the rivalry between Barcelona and Real Madrid compare to one between Inter and Milan?
The climate in the build-up is similar because the game is the only thing people speak about for a week before. As for the games, both are characterised by permanent

The little and large show...Ibrahimovic and Messi celebrate another Barcelona goal

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waves of attacking and defending. It's end to end, and a terrific intensity in every move.

Barca made a big thing of presenting you to their fans at Camp Nou. What was that like?
It was an amazing thing. I can't explain it with words because you'd need to be me to understand what it was like. It was a once in a lifetime kind of experience – I had a lot of fun. I was a little nervous because I didn't know how many people were waiting for me when I was about to go out on to the pitch. But when I did and saw that the stadium was full, the feeling of joy was like what a child feels when he is given a brand new toy.

What have been the high and low points at Barcelona so far?
The best thing has been the chance to play at Camp Nou and show the world that I can play for this Barcelona side. The low points have been any time I've played badly. It's not that everybody else criticises me, but I see it for myself. I'm a very realistic guy and when I don't play well, I'm the first to admit it.

So, you can score a goal, finish on the winning side and still not feel happy because you feel you've not played well?
That happens often. The priority for me, much more than scoring, is to play well.

If you have a bad game, do you talk about it with family or friends?
A little, but in general I keep it to myself.

You've had a few months playing with Messi now. What do you make of him? Are the comparisons with the likes of Diego Maradona, Pele and Alfredo Di Stefano justified?
I don't like those comparisons. Too often people say that it was easier to play in Pele's time, but it's not like that. You can only compare players who have played in the same period. Leo has achieved everything and he's only 22. He's been lucky to always have great players as team-mates at Barcelona. Ronaldinho helped him so much, and now his current team-mates. It's a great advantage to have top players around you and not many players have the good fortune to play for the champions. But Leo is doing a great job and I hope he keeps it up because, usually, when you win everything so young, you start to take it easy, but he seems motivated and always looks forward to winning more.

What has Messi got technically that makes him stand out so much?
He's got everything – both individually and in his team game. The team helps him and he helps the team. You can tell he feels very comfortable. He's been at Barcelona for a decade and it shows.

Who is the toughest defender you've had to face?
I think that the best defenders are the Italians. It's very difficult to be a striker in Italy because the most important thing there is to get back and play on the counter-attack. I played against some great man-markers: Paolo Maldini, Alessandro Nesta, Lilian Thuram and Fabio Cannavaro. What I liked is that it meant I needed to produce my best to get the better of them. Serie A is a very good competition.

You played in Holland, Italy and now in Spain. Have you any desire to try England at some point?
I never think about the future. Today my job is with Barcelona and that's where my thoughts are. If you think in the future, you may never get there.

Missing out on the World Cup must have been a big disappointment?
True...it was very hard. I was angry because you want to play at a World Cup. I think the strongest players should be at the World Cup. But sometimes you don't have luck on your side, or the time isn't right. We have to understand that we are not Spain or Italy or England. We are a small country with nine million people; we don't have lots of top stars playing in the best European leagues. We do have good players, but this is not enough. Not qualifying makes me feel so bad. I won't even be watching it on the TV. I'm not interested. If I can't play, I won't watch... perhaps the Final. But I'll probably be having the longest holiday of my career.

What will you do instead?
I don't know. I don't want to suffer. I need to look forward, enjoy myself, and think about other things. I've decided I won't play for Sweden any more.

Was it a difficult decision?
These are always tough decisions, and I gave it a lot of thought.

Will we definitely never see you play for Sweden again?
As things stand I don't want to even think about it any more because the next two months for Barcelona are absolutely crucial.

With yourself, Henrik Larsson and Freddie Ljungberg gone, it feels like the end of a generation. Do you see a new Swedish generation emerging?
Eventually. It always comes along, but you can never know when.

Interview by Sergio Levinsky/Libero Language Lab

Club before country... Ibrahimovic has turned his back on Sweden

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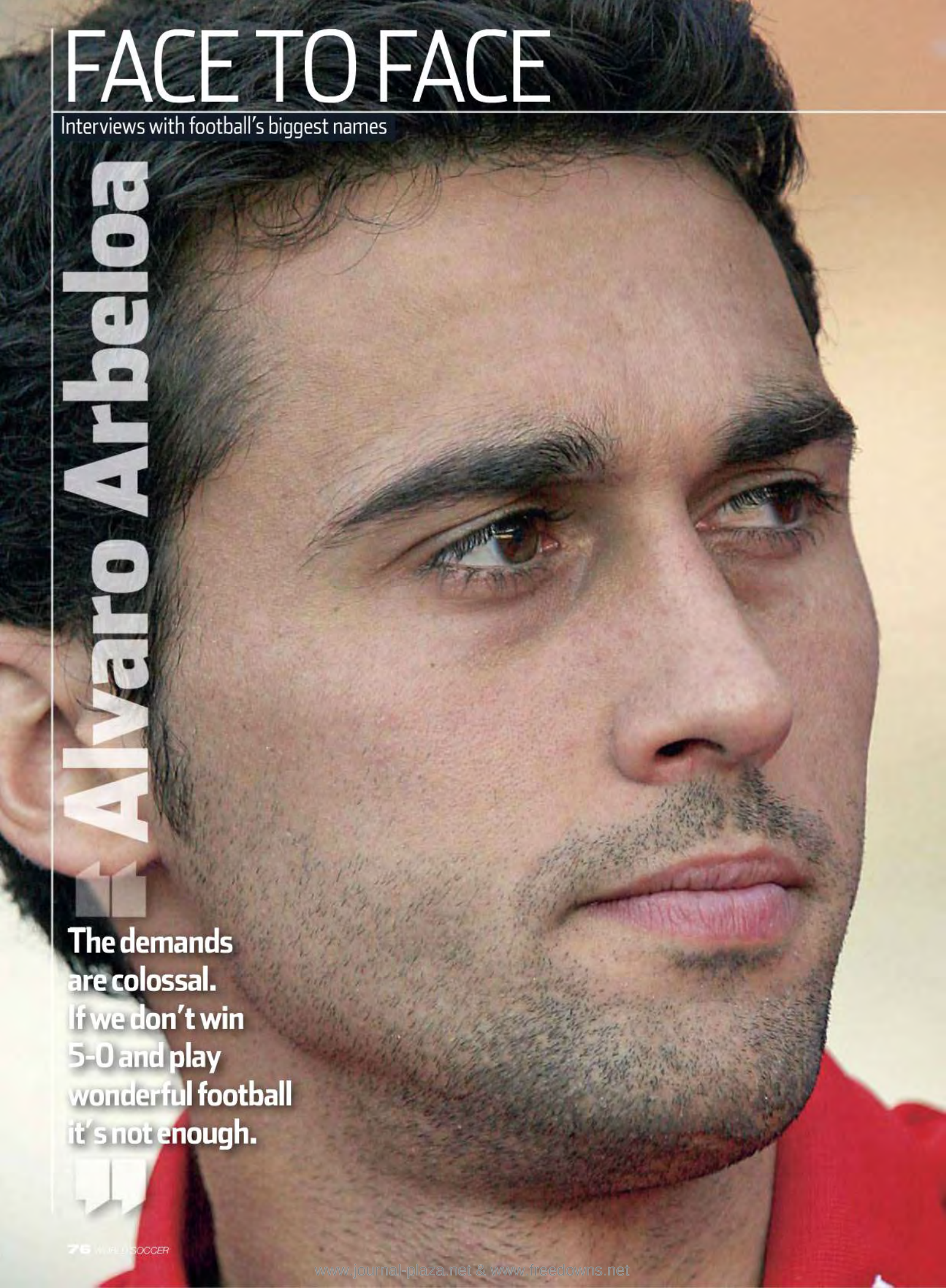
FACE TO FACE

Interviews with football's biggest names



Alvaro Arbeloa

The demands are colossal. If we don't win 5-0 and play wonderful football it's not enough.

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Alvaro Arbeloa

The former Liverpool defender reveals what life is like among the galacticos

Real Madrid have to be perfect

You began your career at Real Madrid. Moving to the Bernabeu from Liverpool last summer must have been like a homecoming for you...

Yes, but it's a different Madrid and a different me. When I left I was a kid and I wasn't ready. I left without a buy-back option, thinking the door would remain shut. I'm glad to have been wrong. I took a decision that I thought was right at the time and I still think so. It's hard to make the first team. The pressure is intense; there wasn't the stability that a fantastic generation of youth teamers perhaps needed. And, as for me, I wasn't ready. This summer, I was. Things have fallen into place: the return of the president [Florentino Perez], my situation at Liverpool, my development. I've been lucky.

How important were Liverpool and Rafa Benitez in your development?

Hugely important. It was a wonderful opportunity and a great experience. Rafa is very, very, very demanding. He pushes you extremely hard. To work with him you have to have patience and understanding; you need to accept what he's like. There's no doubt that if you can work with him, he improves you. He's correcting you every single second, always wanting more. That was good for me. So was going to the Premier League because it's so much more physical. It made new demands, developing sides of my game that I hadn't developed in Spain.

What stood out most about English football?

The fans, the folklore, the atmosphere, the feeling, the intensity. There's a respect, a kind of deference, towards tradition and identity. In Spain, the team has to carry the fans; in England it's the other way round. Madrid's fans demand the best, Liverpool's fans help you produce it.

What are the biggest differences between Manuel Pellegrini and Rafa Benitez?

Pellegrini gives players more freedom, he's not so intense and has more of a soft approach. The style is different. We play two-touch, there's more willingness to take risks; Rafa doesn't want you to take any risks ever. Rafa's happy to score the first and sit back; Pellegrini is the opposite. He's more focused on possession. They're different concepts, and both perfectly acceptable.

But should Liverpool and Rafa let go a bit? Do they need to be freer, more creative?

Rafa was a bit more attacking last season. Liverpool follow Rafa's instructions very closely. What Rafa wants, the team does. Rafa works hard during the week and a lot of the time the team plays on memory. That's very good in certain situations, but there are moments that you need to think for yourself and do something unexpected. If the opposition works you out, you need another option. Sometimes, within [Benitez's] framework, doing something unpredictable is hard. Every player knows what he wants. The 1-2-3 you work on in the week is the 1-2-3 you produce in the matches. At times that can be a bit robotic.

Was it a relief to leave Liverpool?

I was sad to go, but as soon as I saw I had this opportunity there was no way I could turn it down – the chance to come home and to be part of an incredible project.

Last time, the galactico project failed. Can it work this time?

It is working. The coach has worked very well. When you have a squad like this with very good players but also – and just as importantly – good professionals, then it will work. But the demands are colossal. If we don't win 5-0 and play wonderful football it's not enough. Then there's Barcelona; that increases the pressure. We have to be perfect – play well, beat Barcelona, win big...

You mention "good professionals". Are we wrong to see huge egos when we look at players like Cristiano Ronaldo and Kaka?

Yes. Sometimes the image players project doesn't correspond to reality. Cristiano is the obvious case. Besides, it's good for players to have that touch of arrogance, an ego, the desire to compete, to play every minute, to improve, to slaughter their opponents. It helps the team improve; it's the key to competitiveness.

Are footballers egotistical by design?

Yes. I think we're all a bit egotistical. We all want to play, we all want to be the best.

So, conflicts are inevitable?

Yes, I think that's normal. Not just here. I've never been at a single club where there hasn't been tension on occasions. That happens in football and in all workplaces. What every player wants is for the team to win, sure, but also that he's part of it. So far there hasn't been any problem; there have been minutes and opportunities for everyone.

Are you suggesting team rotation is therefore necessary for psychological factors rather than physical reasons?

Yes, for sure. If you have a player who hasn't played for five or six games, there's the risk that he will switch off. He'll not give his all, he won't train as hard. It's not just about making sure all the players are physically right but that they come to training thinking they have a chance of playing, that they compete – and, as a consequence of that, oblige their team-mates to compete too. You make sure people are happy and working. To do that they have to know that there's a place to fight for. Players want to play, especially in a World Cup year.

You've played at both right-back and left-back. Ultimately, what do you see your role being? What are your aims?

You look at the bench, or in the stands, at the players who aren't even playing and they are brilliant footballers. I know it's hard but my mentality is to fight and persuade Pellegrini that I deserve a place – in any position. One thing is very important: if I'm left out it's because someone has decided, not because I failed to give everything.

Interview by Sid Lowe

Back home...Arbeloa first joined Real as a teenager

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PARAGUAY

Pablo VELAZQUEZ

Libertadores Cup helps push striker's World Cup credentials

THE SHOOTING of Salvador Cabanas and Roque Santa Cruz's injury woes have put the spotlight on the depth of Paraguay's attacking resources for this summer.

Many in Europe will be expecting Oscar Cardozo to play an important role in South Africa, but the Benfica man has, so far, struggled to reproduce his club form for his country. Back home, however, another lanky, left-footer is coming through strongly, with Libertad's Pablo Velazquez attracting the attention of some of South America's major clubs while making a late bid for a World Cup place.

Becoming an overnight sensation has taken a few years. Velazquez scored on his Libertad debut in 2005, but then found opportunities hard to come by. He made little impression in a disappointing Paraguay side that hosted the 2007 South American Under-20 Championship and did little of note at club level – even though Libertad racked up four consecutive titles – until he went out on loan in 2009, joining newly promoted Rubio Nu and finishing up as the league's top scorer with 15 goals in the apertura.

There was interest from River Plate and San Lorenzo of Argentina, and firm intent from Palmeiras of Brazil, but Libertad brought him back this season and the 23-year-old's goals took them through the qualifying round of the Libertadores Cup.

He followed his two goals against Deportivo Tachira of Venezuela with another one away to Argentina's Lanus in the first game of the group stage and Velazquez looked instantly at home leading the Libertad line.

"I'm a centre-forward who likes to drop deep to link up the play, then arrive in the penalty area with space to finish," he says.

Libertad coach Javier Torrente has constructed his side with the strengths of Velazquez in mind, using the tricky Javier Gonzalez and the promising Rodolfo Gamarra on the flanks of a front three. In the middle, Velazquez can drop to receive the ball or use his 6ft 3in frame to flick on headers for the wingers.

The striker also relies on the excellent service of right wing-back Victor Ayala. The combination is so good that, in February, Universitario of Peru appeared to have based their entire defensive strategy around not allowing Ayala the space to cross for Velazquez.

For all his height, it is on the ground that Velazquez is most impressive. He may lack acceleration, but he turns well and has a left foot that is both powerful and subtle.

He muses about a later career as a nutrition engineer, but for the next few years it will surely be football that puts the food on his table.

Tim Vickery

FACT FILE

Club Libertad
Country Paraguay
Born March 12, 1987, in Asuncion
Previous club Rubio Nu (loan)
International debut November 2009, v Chile
International caps 1 (0 goals)
Honours Paraguayan championship 2006 and 2007, apertura 2008, clausura 2008

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Eyal Golasa

Israeli teen with big ambitions

ISRAEL

WHEN Maccabi Haifa's outstanding teenage midfielder eventually does move on, he should hope that the parting of the ways is more clean cut than his recent botched switch to Lazio; a shambolic affair in which he thought it wise to sign for the Serie A side without his club's knowledge.

Golasa claimed he was free to do as he pleased since he had no professional deal with the Israeli champions because, on joining the club in 2008 from youth team Beitar Nes Tubruk, he only put pen to paper on a junior player protocol which ran out when he turned 18. Maccabi, inevitably, saw the matter in a different light, insisted the agreement remained valid and threatened an appeal to FIFA.

In the end the deal did not go through. No doubt influenced by the wave of criticism at home, and Haifa's hardball attitude, he had second thoughts about a money-motivated move – which was probably the best course of action for a youngster of huge potential but meagre experience.

A playmaker with astonishing composure on the ball and an infinite array of impudent skills, Golasa first began to assemble a continental-wide fan club when helping Maccabi qualify for the Champions League last summer – his goals, swagger and an ability to make things happen proving too much for opponents such as Salzburg and Aktobe of Kazakhstan.

Give him time and a little more maturity and he should fulfil expectations that he is the heir apparent to national team superstar, Yossi Benayoun of Liverpool.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Maccabi Haifa
Country Israel
Born October 7, 1991 in Netanya
Honours Israeli league 2009

Seydou Doumbia

Ivorian forward bound for CSKA

IVORY COAST

FACT FILE

Club Young Boys (Swi)
Country Ivory Coast
Born December 31, 1987 in Manilla
Previous clubs AS Athletique D'Ajame, ASEC Mimosas, AS Denguele, Kashiwa Reysol (Jap), Tokushima Vortis (Jap, loan)
International debut May 2008 v Japan
International caps 6 (2 goals)

HOWEVER deployed, Ivorian striker Doumbia, who is the spearhead of Swiss side Young Boys, can be relied on to find a way to put the ball in the back of the net.

Despite beginning the vast majority of games last season on the bench, he still managed to finish the campaign as the Swiss league's top marksman – 20 goals in all at an outstanding rate of one every 69 minutes – and this term, as a starter, he has proved even more prolific, notching a goal a game for the title aspirants.

Little wonder then that Doumbia, who joined Young Boys from J.League side Kashiwa Reysol for a paltry £130,000 in the summer of 2008, is so popular in the Swiss capital of Berne and that YB fans regularly serenade him with their own version of the old gospel song *Kumbaya*: "Doumbia, my Lord, Doumbia."

Young Boys coach Vladimir Petkovic says: "I'd like to think we've put in place the framework to get the best out of Seydou. However, it's also fair to say that he doesn't always need help.

"He's so quick and such a force of nature that he makes things happen all on his own. He can go overboard with the individual stuff and dribble too much but with a touch more restraint, he'll be a massive star."

But YB followers will soon have to bid farewell to the Ivory Coast international, who rather than respond to the siren song of clubs in England, Germany and France, recently concluded a £6million switch to CSKA Moscow, agreeing to join them at the end of the current Swiss season. The west African hopes his legacy to Young Boys will be the club's first league title in 25 years.

Nick Bidwell

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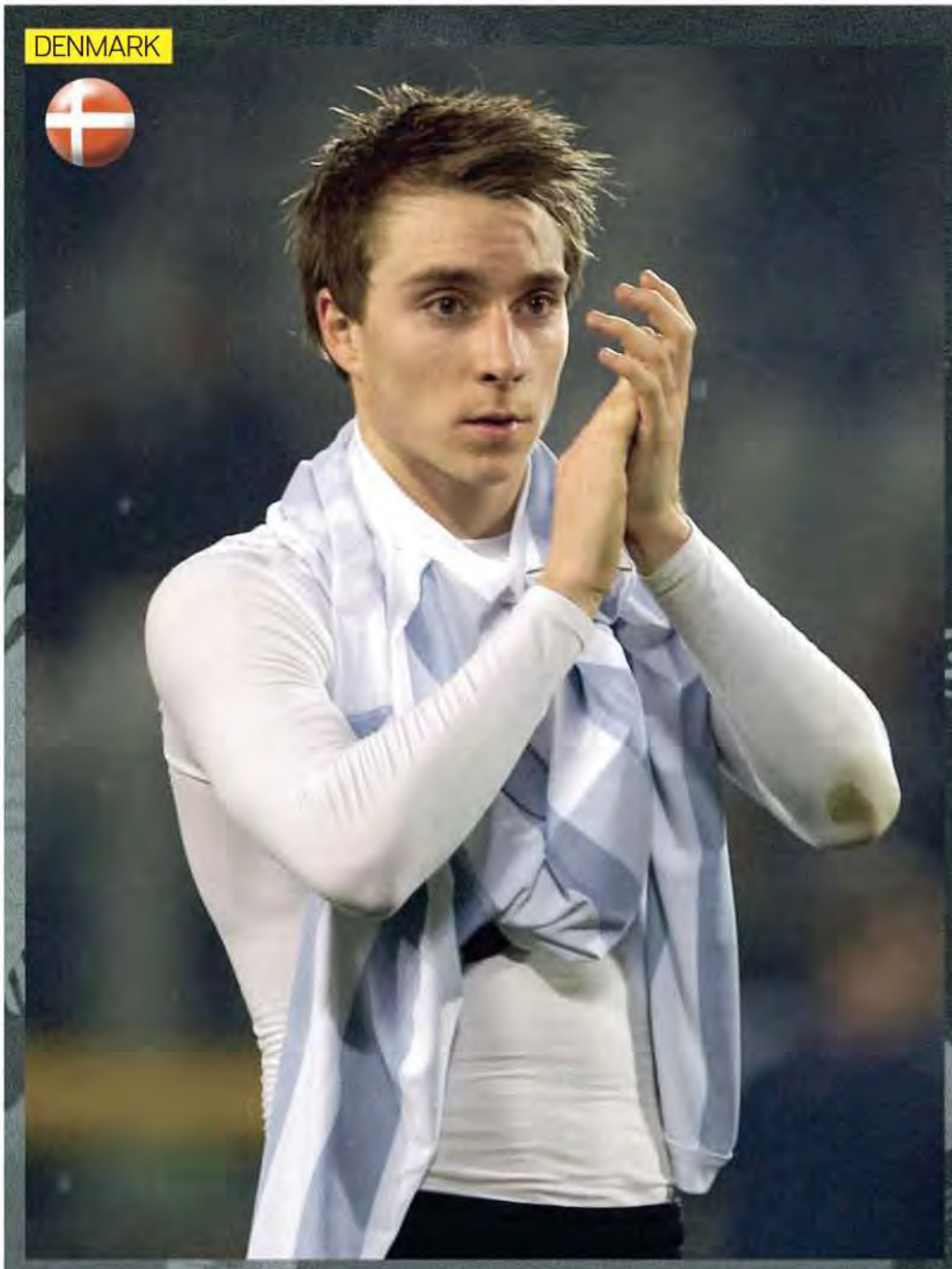
DENMARK



Christian ERIKSEN

Teenage playmaker tipped for World Cup call-up

THERE HASN'T been such hype about a young footballer in Denmark since the emergence of Michael Laudrup nearly 30 years ago. But even though the down-to-earth Danes aren't people who become easily over-excited, Christian Eriksen has got them rather worked up.

He made his international debut a few weeks after turning 18, just like Laudrup, and the whole nation, it seems, wants the kid to be taken to the World Cup. Why wait four years, they say, to put such a wonderful talent on the big stage?

National coach Morten Olsen is biding his time on the decision, but he has no doubt about the potential of Eriksen, saying: "We have known about his talent for many years as a junior and it is very encouraging to see him develop. I wouldn't have picked him for an international against Austria if it wasn't right for him."

What excites the fans and the pundits – and the biggest clubs in Europe – so much is that Eriksen appears to be a genuinely high-class playmaker. He is only 5ft 9in, but then playmakers are often slight figures on the field.

A measure of his swift progress at Ajax – he only made his full league debut in January – is that Barcelona, Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United are already trying to tempt him to join them. For the moment, he is resisting; he says he prefers the chance to develop in the Dutch league, as Danes like Soren Lerby and Frank Arnesen did years ago.

Eriksen began as a small boy at local club Middlefart, on the Danish island of Funen, and then moved to the juniors of OB Odense. His class was already evident as he starred in all the national age-group levels for Denmark before joining the Ajax academy.

His passing can be sublime, his temperament excellent and he has started scoring goals for Ajax too. Club boss Martin Jol likens him to Wesley Sneijder in style, but many Danes think he will be superior to the Dutchman.

Jan Molby, another Dane who once moved to Ajax as a boy, believes Eriksen could become a world-class player.

"He has everything you need," says Molby. "Great skill and vision and touch on the ball. He is progressing so well that he could add another 15 per cent to his game by the summer – and, yes, I'd take him to the World Cup finals."

Jim Holden

FACT FILE

Club	Ajax (Hol)
Country	Denmark
Born	February 14, 1992
Previous club	OB Odense
International debut	March 2010 v Austria
International caps	1 (0 goals)

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JOHANNESBURG The stadiums, the history, what to see, how to get there

Final coun

THE OPENING MATCH and Final of this summer's World Cup will be played in Johannesburg at its showcase Soccer City Stadium. The City of Gold will accommodate more World Cup 2010 matches than any other and, of the nine host cities, Johannesburg is the only one with two participating stadia, with rugby mecca Ellis Park also converted into duty.

Johannesburg will be the 16th city to stage a World Cup Final since Montevideo in 1930 and, following FIFA's decision in 2004 to award the tournament to South Africa, it has been gearing up to act as the prime host with a number of security and transport measures, as well as significant overhauls of its two venues.

Soccer City Stadium, Africa's biggest arena, has been reconstructed to resemble the form of a traditional African pot, the calabash, and can accommodate 94,700 spectators, making it a fitting venue to stage the continent's first World Cup.

If any city defines South Africa's transition from brutal regime to World Cup host it's Johannesburg. Jo'burg, or Jozi as many refer to it, is also home to the nation's best-known football clubs: fierce rivals the Kaizer Chiefs and the Orlando Pirates.

Built on the gold industry and linked with the bloody conflicts under the previous regime, this city of nearly four million people is currently enjoying a tangible economic revival, particularly in light of a 10 billion rand (£0.9billion) investment in the city centre. Previous shocking crime figures have been reduced and, as of 2008, every downtown street corner has a fixed CCTV camera in place. Be warned, though, that taxi ranks are still

All systems go...the official turning on of the lights at Soccer City Stadium in December 2009

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tdown

Peterjon Cresswell visits the home of the 2010 World Cup Final

notorious hunting grounds for muggers.

Financial hub, beneficiary of the recent rise in the price of gold, media and retail centre, Jo'burg is a working metropolis, not a tourist destination – though it does have a number of worthwhile attractions, most notably the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Apartheid Museum. If you just want to wander with no aim in mind, Richmond Hill is a trendifying old quarter of boutiques, bars and eateries. Note that the Hillbrow, Berea and township areas are not safe – and carjacking is still rife.

Soccer City is found south-west of the city centre, out towards Soweto, while Ellis Park is in New Doornfontein, nearer to town, in the south-east. Viewing zones are being set up for fans in 12 sites around Greater Johannesburg, including Mary Fitzgerald Park in Newtown, Innes Free Park in Sandton and Elkah Stadium in Soweto.

Meanwhile a transport initiative, the Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT) will create 25 kilometres of dedicated lanes and nearly 30 stops to transport fans from all areas of the city and to ferry supporters to the two stadia. There will also be extra services on the train line between central Park Station and Ellis Park, and towards Soweto.

Note, however, that the northern neighbourhoods are not served by the train system.

"Johannesburg will be the 16th city to stage a World Cup Final"

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JOHANNESBURG SURVIVAL GUIDE

South Africa prepares to welcome the World Cup

● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

The OR Tambo, or Johannesburg International Airport (help desk +27 22 921 6262, flight information +27 86 727 7888, www.airports.co.za), is 14 miles east of the city out towards Kempton Park. Its international terminal has been expanded for the World Cup 2010. A new train connection between the airport and Sandton in the city's business quarter should be ready for June.

The R24 Airport Freeway links with the N3 Eastern Bypass and R21 highway for road links to the city.

The best way to the city by public transport is the Magic Bus shuttle (+27 11 394 6902 or +27 11 548 0800). Airport-approved taxis bearing the ASCA logo await outside Arrivals to take you to your destination – contact the help desk (see number above) if you have any complaints.

In town, the Metrorail and Metrobus (+27 11 375 5555, www.mbus.co.za) networks are the mainstays of public transportation, as well as the recently upgraded Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

The rail hub is Park Station, just north of the business quarter. There are two classes of ticket, standard Metro and superior Metroplus. The bus network has eight zones and cheaper, pre-paid tickets can be bought from Computicket outlets at major stops such as Gandhi Square, Park Station, Sandton City, and so on.

Minibus taxis can be picked up from designated ranks (see www.joburg.org.za for a full list) can take you across town for pennies – carry loose change – but beware that thieves often operate in the bustle around stops.

If you're taking a taxi car, fix a price beforehand.

● INFORMATION & HOTELS

The tourist office (www.joburg.org.za) has a list of hotel options. If an airport location is most convenient, try the five-star Intercontinental Johannesburg, opposite terminal 3 (+27 11 961 5400, www.intercontinental.com), with 138 recently refurbished rooms – though availability is very limited during the World Cup.

Alternatively, the Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre (www.birchwoodhotel.co.za) has 450 rooms four miles from the airport and near the East Rand shopping mall.

In town, the Hotel Formula 1 (www.hotelformula1.co.za) has several well-priced locations in and around Johannesburg. Accoustix (www.accoustix.co.za) has budget and backpacker accommodation throughout South Africa.

● EATING & DRINKING

Street food barbecues offer pap en vleis and other meaty snacks from the side of the road, though this may not be the healthiest option.

Hotel restaurants offer reliably good food, such as the Mozambican dishes on offer at the Troyeville (25 Bezuidenhout St, +27 11 402 7709, www.troyevillehotel.co.za) within easy reach of Ellis Park.

If you just fancy browsing a few menus and taking your pick, the Melville neighbourhood is around Jo'burg's media hub and can offer Mediterranean, Thai and Vietnamese cuisine. The recently renamed Lucky Bean, formerly

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THE STADIUMS

SOCCER CITY STADIUM
Also known as the FNB Stadium, this has been a temple to football since its inauguration in 1987 and will host the opening World Cup game between South Africa and Mexico on June 11, right after the opening ceremony. The 94,500-capacity stadium incorporates an exterior designed around the traditional calabash African pot.

ELLIS PARK STADIUM
The home of South African rugby. Originally opened in 1928, it was here that South Africa beat New Zealand in the 1995 rugby World Cup Final, the subject of the recent movie *Invictus*. Ellis Park can now accommodate a crowd of 70,000, including an extra 10,000 partly housed in new upper tiers behind each goal.

Soulsa (16 7th Street, +27 11 482 5572, www.luckybeantree.co.za), also a guest house, offers quality fusion cuisine to loyal regulars.

For Indian and Pakistani restaurants, head to Fordsburg – there Daawat (Lilian Rd, +27 11 838 9962) is highly regarded.

Bars will be set up around Mary Fitzgerald Square in Newtown and the Montecasino piazza in Fourways, though for more character, don't miss the Radium Beer Hall in Orange Grove (282 Louis Botha Avenue, +27 11 728 3866, www.theradium.co.za). This community pub was taken over in 1944 by Joe Barbarovich, who is pictured on the wall during his days as a footballer in the 1930s. It hosts live music four times a week, mainly jazz.

The Crazy 88 (114 William Rd, Norwood, +27 11 728 8417, www.88.co.za) stages quality DJs for an admission fee of around R100. Opened in 2004, it has hosted the Ministry of Sound.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT
The Apartheid Museum (+27 11 309 4700, www.apartheidmuseum.org) is an essential stop for anyone interested in South Africa's recent, brutal history. It's located at Gold Reef City – set aside half a day if you can.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery (Klein St, Joubert Park, +27 11 725 3130) not only has Flemish, Dutch and African art in a Lutyens-designed building, it's also free to visitors. The Cradle of Humankind, served by the Maropeng Visitor Centre (www.maropeng.co.za), features prehistoric caves linked to mankind's earliest development, is an hour's drive away, while the Pilanesberg Game Reserve (+27 14 555 1600, www.pilanesberg-game-reserve.co.za), home to the so-called big five animals, is another hour's drive north-west.

Regular half-day or day tours are offered to the Soweto township. Sandton City, Hyde Park, Rosebank and Southgate number among Johannesburg's many shopping malls. The Rosebank Mall contains the African Craft Market (+27 11 880 2906), with a rooftop flea market on Sundays.

● MATCH DAY
Soccer City Stadium is situated south-west of town, out towards Soweto, at Nasrec before Diepkloof, where the Soweto Highway meets the Nasrec Road. Special BRT will ferry fans to and from the ground.

Ellis Park is nearer to town, south-east of the centre at New Doornfontein, with its own stop on the Metrotrain network from central Park Station.

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Continental clash

Caracas' Venezuela striker Rafael Castellin (in red) battles it out with Chile defender Hans Martinez of Universidad Catolica during a Libertadores Cup group game in Venezuela which finished goalless. More information, page 108.

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AUSTRALIA
Sydney triumph over Victory

Spot on...Sydney celebrate victory over Melbourne in the A-League Grand Final penalty shoot-out

LAST September, after Sydney's 2-1 home win over northern rivals Newcastle United Jets, losing coach Branko Culina unleashed an extraordinary tirade at the way his team had been beaten.

Culina fumed: "I don't care what their coach says – and the fact that he's on A$500,000 and I'm on 50 bucks or whatever it is – but if that's what the foreigners are going to bring to this game, let's have more local coaches."

The reference was to Vitezslav Lavicka, the 46-year-old Czech with impressive records at Sparta Prague and Slovan Liberec, who is the only imported coach in the 10-team A-League.

The dignified and mild-mannered Lavicka didn't react. But if he were a man easily given to laughter he would be having a rollicking last laugh six months later after steering Sydney to the championship in his first season, with a team that, for the most part, he inherited rather than built.

Lavicka took over a disunited rabble of a squad which the previous season, under former national captain John Kosmina, missed out on the play-offs completely. He slowly and painstakingly fashioned the team into his way of playing which, a year later, became the envy of the competition.

But it was no stroll and it wasn't until the final stages of the campaign that the team finally ripened, winning it in a thrilling finish that was a scriptwriter's dream come true.

The home straight included four captivating games in four weeks between the season's two big rivals, Sydney and Melbourne Victory, representing the country's two biggest cities – a kind of Real Madrid versus Barcelona hotbed in a more modest Antipodean sense.

Lavicka took over a disunited rabble and slowly fashioned them into a way of playing which became the envy of the competition

The first of the four came in the final round of the home-and-away series; a 2-0 home win for Sydney climaxed by a screamer from John Aloisi, the league's top earner who managed only two goals last season but became Sydney's top marksman under Lavicka. It gave Sydney a first-place finish by one point and secured a berth in the Asian Champions League.

Melbourne then triumphed in their home-and-away clash in the play-offs, winning 4-3 on aggregate, before Sydney re-emerged to meet Victory again, at Melbourne's Etihad Stadium to win the Grand Final 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

The epic punchline to the campaign restored a great deal of credibility to a league which was not entirely untroubled in its fifth season, with its brave expansion, from eight teams to 10, a less than total success.

On the field the two newcomers, Gold Coast United and North Queensland Fury, were not disgraced, especially Gold Coast who, bankrolled by entrepreneur Clive Palmer, one of Australia's richest men, debuted in an elegant third place. Fury, with less brash financial backing, finished two points out of the final play-offs in seventh.

But off the field both were a disaster. Gold Coast struggled to attract more than 5,000 fans to their home games, while North Queensland almost went to the wall, owner Don

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
CARLOS HERNANDEZ (Melbourne Victory)
The 27-year-old Costa Rica midfielder has been the A-League's best player for two seasons and in February walked away with the peer-voted player of the year award. A playmaker in the classic No10 sense, his immaculate technique, intellect and ferocious shooting makes him a most feared opponent. Neutralising Hernandez is a prerequisite for beating the Grand Finalists.

Classic playmaker...Hernandez

Raising the bar...Lavicka

COACH OF THE SEASON
VITEZSLAV LAVICKA (Sydney)
Although Melbourne's Ernie Merrick was named coach of the year before the finals series, by the end of the season Lavicka, a Czech import, had established himself as the league's best coach. This was not just because he carried Sydney to the title, but for also having brought a level of technical and tactical sophistication to the league that it had not experienced before.

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Matheson throwing in the towel at the season's end under the weight of a personal bleed that included a hefty salary paid to former Liverpool star Robbie Fowler.

The Fury were bailed out and kept afloat in the end by a combination of support from a group of local investors and Football Federation Australia (FFA), which dearly wanted to avoid the embarrassment of a failed attempt at expansion.

A bright light was the league's foreign appendage, Wellington Phoenix, from the New Zealand capital, who played to large, buoyant crowds. In November, New Zealand qualified for the World Cup for the first time in 28 years with more than half the national team made up of Phoenix players.

Wellington made the play-offs for the first time and, in front of a capacity 40,000 home crowd – the biggest-ever football attendance in New Zealand – beat Newcastle Jets, only to lose their next match in Sydney.

Despite the uneasy debuts of Gold Coast and North Queensland, the FFA expansion programme continues, with a second team from the Victorian capital, Melbourne Heart, joining next season. It's an ambitious franchise and player recruitment is now underway with another foreign coach, former Ajax star John Van't Schip.

Les Murray

A-LEAGUE – REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sydney	27	15	3	9	35	23	48
Melbourne	27	14	5	8	47	32	47
Gold Coast	27	13	5	9	39	35	44
Wellington	27	10	10	7	37	29	40
Perth	27	11	6	10	40	34	39
Newcastle	27	10	4	13	33	45	34
N Queensland	27	8	8	11	29	46	32
Central Coast	27	7	9	11	32	29	30
Brisbane	27	8	6	13	32	42	30
Adelaide	27	7	8	12	24	33	29

Championship play-offs

1st round

1st round - Feb 20/21

Gold Coast 0 Newcastle 0 (aet; Newcastle 6-5 on pens)

Wellington 1 Perth 1 (aet; Wellington 4-2 on pens)

Major semi-final

1st leg - February 18; 2nd leg - March 7

Melbourne v Sydney 2-1, 2-2 (agg 4-3)

Minor semi-final

Mar 7

Wellington 3 Newcastle 1

Preliminary final

Mar 13

Sydney 4 Wellington 2

Grand Final

Mar 20 - Melbourne

Melbourne 1 (Leijer 82)

Sydney 1 (Bridge 63)

Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 44,560.

Ref: Delovski

Sydney 4-2 on pens

SOUTH AFRICA

SuperSport's super hat-trick

SUPERSPORT UNITED became only the third team in 50 years of professional football in South Africa to claim a trio of successive league titles, following in the footsteps of the now-defunct Highlands Park (1964, 1965, 1966) and Mamelodi Sundowns (1998, 1999, 2000).

Despite his third championship, coach Gavin Hunt – who must surely have his sights set on new challenges – may find it tough to get any meaningful employment outside the country, even with a UEFA pro licence.

Instead, the only way forward for the 45-year-old would seem to be as successor to Carlos Alberto Parreira once the World Cup is over. Hunt has been the subject of some preliminary discussions about taking over the national team but there are other candidates with strong credentials.

The Premier Soccer League season was condensed into six months to allow the best of the home-based players to go off in March with national coach Parreira for training camps in Brazil and Germany. This meant a hectic pace for the teams – who played two games per week – and served to really sort the men from the boys.

In the two previous campaigns, SuperSport had built enough of a lead in the table to allow a slump in their final few games and still be crowned champions and, though it was a much tighter title race this time round, they came through despite losing their final two matches.

With two rounds to go they had a four-point lead over Sundowns. But when SuperSport lost their penultimate game to struggling Wits, instead of cutting the deficit to a single point, Sundowns buckled under the pressure and were beaten by bottom side Jomo Cosmos, thereby handing the championship to SuperSport.

Sundowns have spent heavily in recent seasons in an attempt to re-establish their dominance of the domestic league with their owner, mining magnate Patrice Motsepe, skewing the transfer market and adding a Roman Abramovich-like touch to proceedings. But, like the Russian oligarch, he has found buying success is not as easy as he thought.

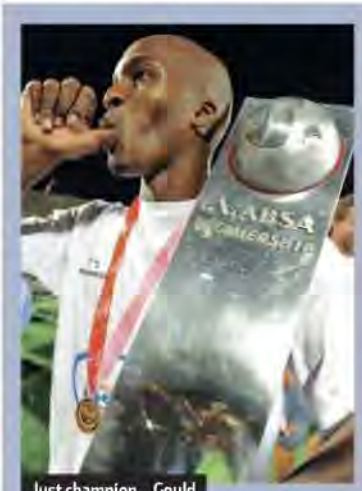
Motsepe has a good relationship with Joan Laporta and it was the Barcelona president who suggested he hire Hristo Stoichkov as coach. The Bulgarian added charisma to the league, enhanced by his comedic limitations in English and his pitchside antics, but he has had a chequered coaching career to date and there was little conviction that he could suddenly change Sundowns' fortunes. By Christmas he had overcome a laboured start and turned his side into title challengers before they fell short.

Stoichkov has since left Sundowns, resigning dramatically on a national radio talk-in show because, he claimed, the club had not offered him a contract extension. He brazenly believed they were keen to keep him, just slovenly in negotiating a new deal, and so he played what he thought would be the trump card – only to find Sundowns were happy to see the back of him.

Mark Gleeson

PSL - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SuperSport	30	16	9	5	51	25	57
Sundowns	30	16	8	6	43	24	56
Chiefs	30	14	9	7	39	25	51
Santos	30	12	11	7	34	20	47
Pirates	30	10	14	6	26	18	44
Celtic	30	9	15	6	38	35	42
Ajax	30	11	9	10	27	29	42
Swallows	30	11	9	10	30	36	42
AmaZulu	30	11	6	13	30	35	39
Wits	30	7	14	9	32	38	35
Maritzburg	30	8	11	11	28	39	35
Arrows	30	6	14	10	25	33	32
FS Stars	30	5	16	9	29	30	31
Platinum Stars	30	9	4	17	26	34	31
Aces	30	5	11	14	20	38	26
Cosmos	30	4	12	14	21	40	24



Just champion...Gould

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
MORGAN GOULD
(SuperSport United)
The defender played a key role for the champions but his hopes of appearing in the World Cup finals have been rocked by an ankle injury.

COACH OF THE SEASON
GAVIN HUNT
(SuperSport United)
Bigger things surely beckon for the all-conquering coach who has led his side to the last three league titles.

Three and easy...Hunt celebrates as SuperSport clinch the title again

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PEOPLE in the news

Back in business...Eriksson

Eriksson off to the World Cup

Former England and Mexico boss SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON has agreed to coach Ivory Coast for the duration of the World Cup finals. The 62-year-old's last managerial job was in charge of English fourth-tier side Notts County.

Eriksson was reported to have been selected from a shortlist of three that included former Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster and ex-Manchester City manager Mark Hughes.

"There is a lot of hard work ahead of me but I like that," Eriksson said. "I am extremely happy and very excited. The Ivory Coast is a good football nation with a lot of good players – it couldn't be better."

"Didier Drogba is one of the best strikers in the world and he has showed that for many years now in the Premier League.

There are other great players too, including Eboue at Arsenal, Salomon Kalou, Kolo Toure – and his brother Yaya at Barcelona.

The only problem is that we are not together until May 22, but that is the same for most of the teams.

I am going to start travelling from tomorrow to see all the players around Europe, and in the Ivory Coast too."

EUROPE

- Finland midfielder ALEXEI EREMENKO returned to his homeland from Ukrainian side Metalist Kharkiv and signed a one-year loan deal with Jaro – where he will be coached by his father, ALEXEI EREMENKO SNR.

- West Ham United defender CALUM DAVENPORT had his contract terminated by mutual consent. The 27-year-old has not played since he sustained leg injuries in a stabbing incident in October.

- Serbia midfielder BOSKO JANKOVIC will miss the World Cup after injuring his left knee playing for Genoa against Internazionale. Jankovic, who returned to the international fold in the 3-0 friendly win over Algeria in March, faces up to six months on the sidelines.

National job...Fernandez

- Former France midfielder LUIS FERNANDEZ, who has been working as a radio pundit since leaving Stade de Reims in June 2009, was appointed national coach of Israel. Fernandez, who has previously coached Paris Saint-Germain and Athletic Bilbao, worked in Israel as coach of Beitar Jerusalem in 2005.

Sidelined...Jankovic

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Final season...Lehmann

Former Germany keeper JENS LEHMANN will retire at the end of the season. The ex-Arsenal No1, currently with Stuttgart, had been linked with a move to Major League Soccer. Germany striker CACAU, who was born in Brazil, will also leave the club as a free agent at the end of the season after rejecting their latest contract offer.

Malta's all-time record scorer MICHAEL MIFSUD, who has been on target 24 times for the national team, returned home to sign a short-term contract with Valletta. The 28-year-old had been without a club since leaving English second-tier side Coventry City last summer.

Ukrainian referee OLEH ORLEKHOV was banned from all football activities for life after he was charged with being in breach of UEFA disciplinary regulations, based on information from ongoing investigations by German police into match-fixing and corruption.

Eredivisie strugglers Den Haag relieved coach RAYMOND ATTEVELD of his duties. The third-from-bottom club have given temporary control to MAURICE STEIJN.

Adios...Jimenez

MANOLO JIMENEZ was sacked as coach of Sevilla after his side drew 1-1 at home to bottom of the table Xerez. The result followed Sevilla's exit from the Champions League after defeat by CSKA Moscow. He has been replaced by ANTONIO ALVAREZ.

SOUTH AMERICA

Internacional midfielder SANDRO has joined Tottenham Hotspur for a reported fee of £6million. The 21-year-old Brazil international will join the Premier League side at the end of the Libertadores Cup this summer.

Spurs' signing...Sandro

CENTRAL AMERICA

Former Mexico centre-back CLAUDIO SUAREZ retired after a career that included 178 international appearances.

Retiring...Suarez

ASIA

Former Bayern Munich midfielder ALI KARIMI returned for Iran in their Asian Cup qualifier against Thailand in March. He had not been selected for the national team since their failure to qualify for the 2010 World Cup.

Australia coach PIM VERBEEK will step down after the World Cup. "After more than two years it is time for me to look for a new challenge," said the 54-year-old, who is likely to be without defender PATRICK KISNORBO in South Africa after he picked up an Achilles injury playing for Leeds United against Millwall in the English third tier.

New challenges...Verbeek

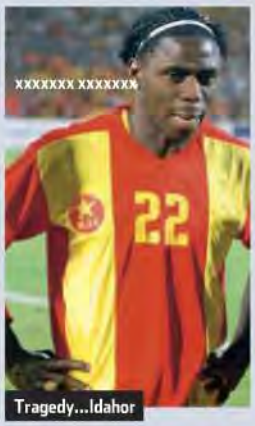
Sydney striker JOHN ALOISI signed a one-year contract with Melbourne Heart ahead of their inaugural A-League campaign.

EMILE RUSTOM, who is also coach of Lebanon's national team, quit as boss of one of the country's top sides, Al Nejmeh, after criticising the club's financial condition. He was replaced by ABDEL AZIZ AL SHAFI.

AFRICA

McDONALD MARIGA became the first Kenyan to play in the UEFA Champions League when he appeared as a substitute for Internazionale in their 1-0 win away to Chelsea.

ABDELLAH BLINDA, who coached Morocco at the 1994 World Cup, died following a cardiac arrest at the age of 59.


Tragedy...Idahor

Nigerian forward ENDURANCE IDAHOR collapsed and died while playing for Al Merreikh against Amal Atbara in Sudan. Less than 48 hours later, a second African player, BARTHOLOMEW YEBOAH, a 20-year-old defender with Kessben, died during a Ghanaian Premier League match against Liberty Professionals.

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BRAZIL

BRASILEIRAO SERIE A 2010

Celebration time...but will Vagner Love (centre) see out the campaign with Flamengo?

KEY DATES

Season starts	May 8, 2010
Mid-season break	June 7, 2010 to July 12, 2010
Season ends	December 4, 2010

LAST season **Flamengo** came from nowhere to win their sixth title – and first since 1992 – with perennial stand-in Andrade establishing himself as first-team coach in the process. However, quite apart from the distraction of the Libertadores Cup, a repeat performance will be difficult.

The contracts of glamorous strike pair Vagner Love and Adriano run out in mid-campaign – and even if the latter stays his tendency to miss training is always liable to set off mini crises in the club's ever-turbulent environment.

The Libertadores will also be a major distraction for **Internacional**, whose Uruguayan coach Jorge Fossati has made the competition his No1 priority. Added to a squad that includes some of Fossati's compatriots is a trio of high profile Argentinians: keeper Roberto Abbondanzieri, and midfielders Andres D'Alessandro and Pablo Guinazu.

Libertadores the target...Fossati

Indifferent form has put Fossati under early pressure and left an impression that striker Nilmar, sold to Spain last year, has not been adequately replaced. Can youngsters Taison and Walter come good and help the club to its first league title since 1979?

Sao Paulo coach Ricardo Gomes admits his side are in transition as he seeks to wean them to a 4-4-2 system after years of playing 3-5-2. The defence looks much more vulnerable than the unit instrumental in the three consecutive championships between 2006 and 2008, and midfielder Hernanes could finally be on his way to Europe in the summer transfer window.

However, Gomes' squad still looks deep enough to be able to launch a challenge for a record seventh title.

As an example of how the Libertadores can affect a side's league campaign, **Cruzeiro** were in the relegation zone after losing in last year's Final before a superb run allowed them to snatch fourth place and a slot in this year's tournament on the final day.

For the third year the team is coached by Adilson Batista and they continue to play attractive, attacking football. Such continuity, and a good youth policy, means that if they can fight on two fronts – national championship and Libertadores – the 2003 champions could be contenders.

Four-times champions **Palmeiras** led the field for months last term, only to collapse so badly that they missed out on the Libertadores. And they have continued collapsing, parting company with coach Muracy Ramalho as a consequence and replacing him with former centre-back Antonio Carlos Zago, whose lack of experience will be tested.

Even with midfielder Lincoln and striker Ewerthon brought back from Europe, results have disappointed and a cloud is hanging over what will almost certainly be the final campaign of legendary goalkeeper Marcos.

Back in the first division last term after 30 years, **Avai** shook off a shaky start to play some attractive football and enjoy by far the best campaign in the club's history. Coach Silas and many of the players have since moved on, and it will be a hard act for replacement Pericles Chamusca to live up to. The current squad includes former Real Madrid and Flamengo favourite, winger Savio.

Continuity...Adilson Batista

Inaugural champions in 1971, **Atletico Mineiro** are still waiting for their second title. They were surprise contenders last year until fading at the end and a serious bid this time round would not be a shock. Coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo seems keen to get his career back on track and the squad looks strong, with Diego Tardelli leading the attack while some experienced foreigners such as Paraguayan centre back Julio Cesar Caceres and Ecuadorian midfielder Edison Mendez have been recruited to the ranks.

Even if Adriano stays, his tendency to miss training is always liable to set off mini crises for Flamengo's ever-turbulent environment

Gremio were top scorers last year, but have since lost Argentinian striker Maxi Lopez, along with centre-backs Leo and Rever, and attacking midfielders Tcheco and Douglas Costa, though they have gained Silas as coach. The former national team midfielder did

Big stretch...keeper Marcos will hope Palmeiras can hold it together in his final season

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Tricky...Robinho is back at Santos

exceptionally well last year with Avai, and will hope to knock into shape a squad which includes ex-Sao Paulo stalwarts Borges and Hugo.

Goias fell away badly last year and have since parted company with striker Iarley and highly rated wing-backs Vitor and Julio Cesar, as well as coach Helio Dos Anjos. His replacement, ex-midfielder Jorginho, lacks experience and may struggle to carry out a rebuilding job. One player to watch is last year's World Youth Cup centre-back Rafael Toloi.

In this their centenary year, **Corinthians**' whole campaign will be based around winning the Libertadores for the first time. To cope with the pressure, coach Mano Meneses has assembled a squad of veterans, spearheaded by Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos, and while this is probably a wise move, it might leave the team without the legs for a gruelling league campaign.

Having moved a few hundred miles instate, from the outskirts of Sao Paulo city to President Prudente following a row with the local council, Barueri have changed their name to **Gremio Prudente** after a highly successful debut season in the first division in which they played some pleasing football but had to survive on tiny gates.

While they should now attract bigger crowds, the squad is much changed, though the stand-out name in Toninho Cecilio's line up is ex-*Selecao* midfielder Marcos Assuncao.

Flavour of the month under Dorival Junior, **Santos** played some exuberant football in their state championship and piled up some huge scores with a bold 4-3-3 formation in which youngsters Neymar and Paulo Henrique enjoyed themselves hugely, along, of course, with Robinho.

It is hard to see how Robinho can stay after the World Cup, but it will be fascinating to observe how this latest crop of Santos wonderkids cope once the regional competitions come to an end and the level goes up a notch in the national championship.

Vitoria are a club who produce a lot of players, but who have never won the title and not been in serious contention since a fourth-place finish in 1999. It is hard to see coach Ricardo Silva and his men putting in a consistent bid this year. First division survival would be acceptable; qualification for next year's Libertadores a bonus.

Ambitious provincial club **Atletico Paranaense**, champions in 2001, have gone off the rails of late with four consecutive disappointing league campaigns. The surprise sacking of coach Antonio Lopes suggests that things might not get significantly better in 2010. Strong home form should avert disaster.

Champions in 1995, the once mighty **Botafogo** are currently more of a low-budget operation. In Joel Santana they have a coach well versed in a cautious, counter-attacking approach in which veteran Uruguayan striker Sebastian Abreu provides the target for an aerial assault. Botafogo flirted with relegation right up until the end of last year and survival will again be the aim.

I'm loco about No13...Botafogo new boy Sebastian Abreu meets club legend Mario Zagallo

Put your shirt on me...Fred's fitness will be crucial to Fluminense

Fluminense looked doomed to the second division until saved by an extraordinary run of form at the end of last year with coach Cuca settling on a 3-5-2 formation in which the wing-backs were thrown forward.

If national team striker Fred can stay fit, and graduates of the club's youth system keep coming through, the 1984 champions should finish closer to the top than the bottom.

Back after a year's absence, having finishing top of the second division, four-times champions **Vasco da Gama** have lost coach Dorival Junior, and his replacement, Vagner Mancini, was sacked in late March after a disappointing run of results in the state championship.

Ex-Porto playmaker Carlos Alberto and Internazionale-bound youngster Philippe Coutinho will need to be at their best if the club are to enjoy a comfortable return to the top flight.

Guarani return to the first division after two consecutive promotions, but they are still in the second division of the Sao Paulo state championship and will surely feel the step up in quality when the national competition starts. Vadao will need all his coaching experience to keep them afloat.

Ceara are a north-eastern club with sizeable support but little national tradition and this will be only their second season in the first division in the last 23 years. Travelling time might prove a problem for ambitious coach Paulo Cesar Gusmao and his men as there will be a sizeable journey for every away game.

Back in the top flight for the first time since the late 1980s, **Atletico Goainiense** are a club who have taken huge recent strides. Having spent time outside the three national divisions this decade, they now return to the first division after two successive promotions. A free-scoring side last year, they have since brought in coach Geninho, a specialist in the 3-5-2 system, to tighten up the defence.

Big impression...Goias' Rafael Toloi (green)

Tim Vickery

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BELARUS
PREMIER LEAGUE 2010

KEY DATES

Season starts	April 2, 2010
Mid-season break	July 4, 2010 to July 25, 2010
Season ends	November 20, 2010

REIGNING champions **BATE** look stronger than ever as they go in search of a fifth successive league crown. With key players such as defender Sergei Sosnovski, veteran midfielder Dmitri Likhtarovich and powerful forward Vitali Rodionov still at the club, the only significant departure during the close season was midfielder Sergey Krivets, who joined Poland's Lech Poznan. He is replaced by a Brazilian, Renan Bressan, who joins from relegated Gomel.

Dinamo Minsk will again be BATE's main challengers, though instability has always been their biggest problem with president Yuri Chizh hiring and firing 20 coaches during his 10 years reign. Sergei Gurenko, who started last season as a player and ended it as head coach, has surprisingly retained his post and added MTZ-RIPO goalkeeper Alyaksandr Sulima, and midfielder Anton Matveenko and forward Alyaksandr Sazankov from Dnepr. He also signed Belarus Under-19 forward Tienchen Vogba, who is of Cameroonian origin and considered one of the country's promising attackers.

Staying put...Rodionov

League champions in 2005, **Shakhtyor** have hired 67-year-old former Soviet Union coach Eduard Malofeyev and he has boosted the Miners squad by signing Lithuania goalkeeper Eduardas Kurskis and forward Dmitri Komarovski from Naftan, and defender Mikalay Asipovich from MTZ-RIPO.

Dnepr will try to retain the third place they gained last season despite losing Matveenko and Sazankov. Their worthy replacements are Maksim Karpovich from Naftan and Vladimir Yurchenko from Russian Premier League club Saturn.

FC Minsk will be counting on the experience of new defender Andrey Dzivakow from Vitebsk and Dzmitry Klimovich from Torpedo Zhodino, while Belarus Cup holders **Naftan** suffered a large exodus of experienced players and the gaps will have to be filled by youngsters from the club academy.

Former BATE and Belarus coach Yuri Puntus was recruited by **Dinamo Brest** last year and they are in the process of building a side that should be able to fight for a Europa League spot.

Despite Aleksandr Brazevich taking over as coach, **Torpedo Zhodino** are expected to struggle, along with Vitebsk, who had a transfer ban imposed.

MTZ-RIPO have been renamed **FC Partizan Minsk** this season and they could find themselves in big trouble after losing their vastly experienced goalkeeper Sulima to Dynamo Minsk. Meanwhile, simply staying up will be the goal of newly promoted Belshyna, who have completely changed their squad by signing 16 new players, and **Neman**.

Oleg Zadernovsky

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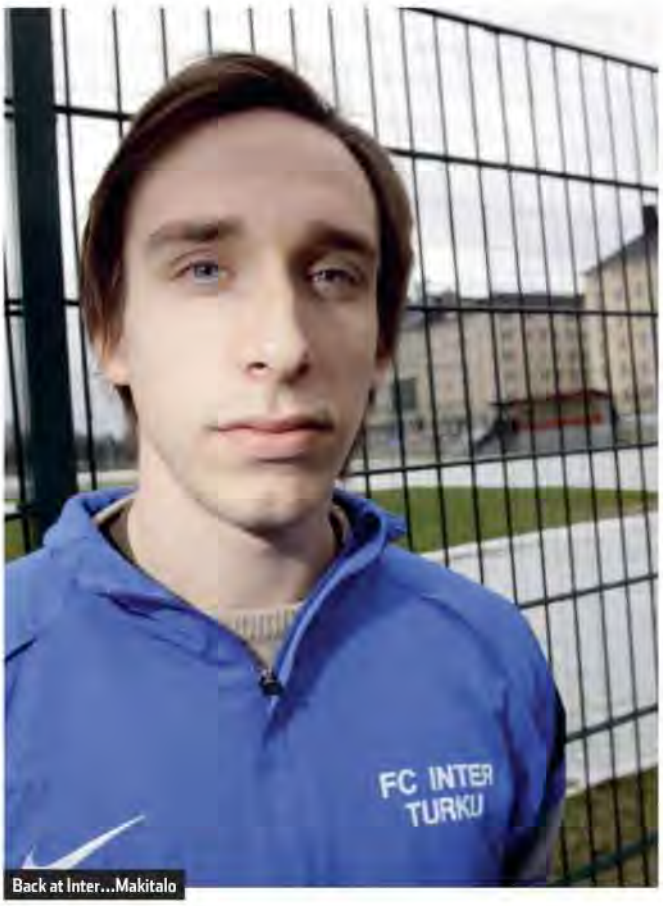
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/belarus



Back at Inter...Makitalo

FINLAND
VEIKKAUSLIIGA 2010

KEY DATES

Season starts	April 16, 2010
Season ends	October 23, 2010

THE new season has been dubbed "the year of the returnee" in honour of the players returning this year. Finns with international experience playing in Veikkausliiga this term include Jonatan Johansson, Alexei Eremenko Jr, Mika Nurmela, Juho Makela, Jari Litmanen, Aki Riihilahti, Toni Kuivasto, Janne Saarinen and Juha Pasoja.

The budget cutbacks in other European leagues has helped create this influx and added an air of optimism to a league that has just signed its first significant TV deal.

While Eremenko Jr and Johansson may be trump cards for Jaro and TPS respectively, it is hard to see beyond the Helsinki-area clubs for likely title winners.

While HJK have strengthened since last year's title triumph, Mika Lehkosuo, coach of their Espoo rivals Honka has promised his club's supporters that they will not repeat their traditional nightmare start.

HJK coach Antti Muurinen sees the arrival this season of Fulham loanee Danny Hoesen, Swedish centre-back Peter Magnusson, veteran midfielder Janne Saarinen and quicksilver winger Rafinha from Tampere United to strengthen a squad in which the departures have not been big losses.

After finally getting approval for a new 8,000-capacity stadium in Tapiola, **Honka**'s recent experience of near misses and passing football puts them among the leading lights of Finnish football, but with a young side they could struggle to replace Joel Perovuo who joined Djurgarden in Sweden.

The next group of clubs is led by the two sides from the former capital of Turku. **TPS** have cut their budget after years of relatively high spending, but the return of Johansson has lifted the whole

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ICELAND

URVALSDEILD 2010

KEY DATES

Season starts
May 10, 2010
Season ends
September 25, 2010

SINCE securing their first league title in 2004, **FH** have won a further four championships, an Icelandic Cup, four League Cups and three Super Cups, making the Hafnarfjordur club the team to beat once again. Despite losing several key – albeit ageing – players, they looked good in pre-season and wresting the crown from their grasp will be no easy task.

If the pattern of recent seasons is anything to go by, the main prize will ultimately go to the team quickest out of the blocks – an area in which FH's closest competitors have been found wanting. One club looking to correct this defect will be capital side **KR**.

Perennial underachievers since last winning the championship in 2003, the west Reykjavik club has only a solitary 2008 Icelandic Cup win in the intervening years to show for significant investment in players. Having finished three points behind FH last season, coach Logi Olafsson has been very active in the transfer market, strengthening his squad through an astute mix of free transfers and loan signings, most with experience of playing abroad and some returning to KR for the second time.

Across the city, **Valur**, the only club to break FH's hold on the title since 2004, served notice of intent by securing the services of Gunnlaugur Jonsson, one of the country's most promising young coaches, from newly promoted Selfoss before the end of last season. Following his arrival, the close season has seen the departure of a number of familiar faces.

Having finished third and fourth respectively last time out, **Fylkir** and **Fram** will be looking to at least repeat those achievements. For the latter there is also a welcome opportunity to wipe out the bitter disappointment of a penalty shoot-out defeat at the hands of Breidablik in last year's Cup Final.

Buoyed by that success, **Breidablik** will approach the coming season with hopes of improving on last year's fifth-place finish. However, they can expect stiff competition from **Keflavik** and **Grindavik**.

Busy pre-season...Olafsson

After finishing seventh and 10th, last year's newcomers **Stjarnan** and **IBV** face the challenge of avoiding second-season syndrome. Failure to sustain performances that enabled them to survive their first season saw Fjolnir and Throttur return to the first division last time out and, after a shaky finish, Stjarnan will hope to recapture last year's early season form.

For newly promoted **Selfoss** and **Haukar** there is the challenge of entering virtually uncharted territory, with the former appearing in the top flight for the first time and the latter not having been there since 1979.

Rab Christie

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club, which starts a new era under Marko Rajamaki after the departure of eccentric TV pundit Pasi Rautiainen.

Meanwhile, **Inter** struggled to retain their form after winning the 2008 title, but under coach Job Dragtsma they have restructured. Mika Makitalo returns after spending last season at Haka and, along with American midfielder Daniel Antunez, his influence will be crucial on a team that has struggled to replace Dominic Chatto and Jos Hooiveld to create a new spine.

IFK Mariehamn are pinning their hopes on Mikko Paatelainen providing the goals to lift them into a European spot, but their role as the premier away match in every team's calendar – players like the scouts from Sweden, while fans go for the cheap ferry alcohol – makes every home match a battle and they will struggle to hit that target.

JJK from Jyvaskyla survived the play-offs last season and their new coach, Kari Martonen, freshly arrived from Honka, should help them improve.

Talented...Eremenko Jr

Having signed Juha Pasoja and Jarkko Okkonen to tighten the defence and Mikko Hyyrynen to add some class up front, they should be mid-table.

Haka coach Sami Ristila has a younger team than last year and has attempted to add some experienced foreign players, who have arrived in a steady stream on owner Seppo Koskinen's instructions. This strategy caused friction last season and helping them settle is crucial to Haka's chances.

Traditional strugglers **KuPS** have Dickson Nwakaeme, at least for the start of the season, and the big Nigerian is one of the best players ever to have played in the Veikkausliiga. He should ensure they have a good chance of staying up, even if the 23-year-old leaves mid-season.

Promoted side **AC Oulu**'s financial difficulties are a source of mirth for many, but on the field the Yobe brothers, Donewell and Dominic, along with Canadian striker Frank Jonke and ancient but effective midfielder Mika Nurmela, should ensure they make a fight of the relegation battle.

Jaro's signings have surprised everyone. Eremenko Jr is ludicrously talented for this league and his father is widely regarded as the only coach able to tell him what to do. Venance Zeze and Maksim Vasilijev are also strong additions for a club more used to selling its best assets.

Jaro's local rivals **VPS** of Vaasa will struggle for goals and finish near the bottom, and **MyPa** are among the clubs that are unlikely to be exciting, or finish outside mid-table, but that could drop if they suffer bad luck or injuries.

Tampere United had a difficult financial situation at the end of last season and their squad looks quite thin. If injuries hit hard, they will struggle. **Lahti** have been awful in pre-season, but they do have lower-division goal machine Pekka Sihvola, who could pull them clear of relegation trouble.

Egan Richardson

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Winner...Arsenal's Sol Campbell

ENGLAND

Gunners go on

Arsenal overturned a first-leg deficit for the first time in the Champions League, beating Porto 5-0 at the Emirates, to progress to the quarter-finals 6-2 on aggregate.

Chelsea, meanwhile, failed to overcome their away loss and were beaten 1-0 at home by Internazionale. They also had striker Didier Drogba sent-off in the closing stages and he will now miss Chelsea's next two games in Europe.

RUSSIA

History makers

CSKA Moscow are through to the quarter-finals of the Champions League for the first time after Japan midfielder Keisuke Honda beat Sevilla keeper Andres Palop with a long-range free-kick.

Driving force...Honda

ANDORRA

Champions League spot as FC pip UE

FC Santa Coloma drew 1-1 at home to nearest challengers UE Santa Coloma to win the Primera title for a fifth time.

BELARUS

Super Cup success

League champions BATE beat Belarusian Cup holders

Turnaround...Bobby Zamora (left) scores Fulham's first goal against Juventus

Through...Bayern's Arjen Robben (left) and Franck Ribery celebrate

RESULTS

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round, 2nd legs

Mar 9
Arsenal (Eng) 5 (Bendtner 10, 25, pen 90, Nasri 63, Eboue 66)
Porto (Por) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 59,661. **Ref:** De Bleeckere (Blg)
Arsenal 6-2 on agg
Arsenal: Almunia - Sagna, Campbell, Vermaelen, Clichy, Song, Nasri (Denilson 73), Diaby, Rosicky (Eboue 57), Arshavin (Walcott 76), Bendtner.
Porto: Helton - Fucile, Rolando, Bruno Alves, Pereira, Nuno Andre (Rodriguez 46), Ruben Micael (Guarin 76), Raul Meireles, Silvestre Varela (Gonzalez 76), Falcao Garcia, Hulk.

Mar 9
Fiorentina (Ita) 3 (Vargas 28, Jovetic 54, 64)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Van Bommel 60, Robben 65)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 42,762. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Agg 4-4. Bayern on away goals
Fiorentina: Frey - De Silvestri, Natali, Kroldrup, Felipe (Pasqual 79), Montolivo, Zanetti, Marchionni, Jovetic, Vargas (Keirrison 82), Gilardino.
Bayern: Butt - Lahm, Van Buyten, Badstuber, Alaba, Van Bommel, Schweinsteiger, Robben, Ribery (Pranjic 90), Muller, Gomez (Klose 30).

Mar 10
Manchester United (Eng) 4 (Rooney 13, 46, Park 59, Fletcher 88)
Milan (Ita) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 74,595. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
Manchester United 7-2 on agg
Man Utd: Van der Sar - Neville (Rafael 66), Ferdinand, Vidic, Evra, Fletcher, Scholes (Gibson 73), Valencia, Nani, Park, Rooney (Berbatov 66).
Milan: Abbiati - Abate (Beckham 64), Bonera (Seedorf 46), Thiago Silva, Jankulovski, Flamini, Pirlo, Ambrosini, Borriello (Inzaghi 69), Ronaldinho, Huntelaar.

Mar 10
Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo 6)
Lyon (Fra) 1 (Pjanic 75)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 71,569. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Lyon 2-1 on agg
Real Madrid: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Albiol, Garay, Arbeloa (M Diarra 84), L Diarra, Guti, Granero (Van der Vaart 62), Kaka (Raul 77), Higuain, C Ronaldo.
Lyon: Lloris - Reveillere, Cris, Boumsong (Kallstrom 46), Cissokho, Toulalan, Govou, Makoun (Gonalons 46), Pjanic (Ederson 84), Delgado, Lopez.

Mar 16
Chelsea (Eng) 0
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (Eto'o 79)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 38,107. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Inter 3-1 on agg
Chelsea: Turnbull - Ivanovic, Alex, Terry, Zhirkov (Kalou 73), Ballack (J Cole 62), Mikel, Lampard, Anelka, Drogba, Malouda. *Sent off: Drogba 87min.*
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Samuel, Zanetti, Cambiasso, Sneijder (Mariga 85), Thiago Motta (Materazzi 90), Pandev (Stankovic 75), Eto'o, Milito.

Mar 16
Sevilla (Spa) 1 (Perotti 41)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 2 (Necid 39, Honda 55)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 29,666. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
CSKA 3-2 on agg
Sevilla: Palop - Stankevicius, Fazio, Dragutinovic, Fernando Navarro (Adriano 74), Jesus Navas, Zokora, Renato (Negredo 71), Capel (Kanoute 46), Perotti, Luis Fabiano.
CSKA: Akinfeev - Schennikov, V Berezutsky, Ignashevich, A Berezutsky, Semberas, Aldonin, Krasic (Odiah 72), Honda (Rahimic 82), Gonzalez (Mamaev 87), Necid.

Mar 17
Barcelona (Spa) 4 (Messi 13, 60, Pedro 22, Bojan 89)
Stuttgart (Ger) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 88,543. **Ref:** Hamer (Lux)
Barcelona 5-1 on agg
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique, Puyol, Maxwell, Toure, Busquets (Ibrahimovic 66), Iniesta (Bojan 88), Messi, Pedro, Henry (Milito 78).
Stuttgart: Lehmann - Celozzi (Gebhart 46), Niedermeier, Delpierre, Molinaro, Kuzmanovic, Khedira, Trasch, Hleb, Cacau, Pogrebnyak (Marica 70).

Mar 17
Bordeaux (Fra) 2 (Gourcuff 5, Chamakh 88)
Olympiakos (Gre) 1 (Mitroglou 65)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 31,004. **Ref:** Benquerenca (Por)
Bordeaux 3-1 on agg
Bordeaux: Carrasso - Chalme, Sane, Ciani, Tremoulinas, Fernando, Diarra, Plasil (Sertic 84), Gourcuff, Wendel (Jussie 90), Chamakh. *Sent off: Diarra 69min.*
Olympiakos: Nikopolidis - Torosidis, A Papadopoulos, Mellberg, Raul Bravo, Maresca, Stoltidis (Ledesma 80), Zairi (Mitroglou 63), LuaLua, Datolo, Derbyshire. *Sent off: Derbyshire 60min, Mellberg 90+4min.*

EUROPA LEAGUE

2nd knockout round

1st legs - March 11; 2nd legs - March 18
Atletico Madrid (Spa) v Sporting Lisbon (Por)
0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2; Atletico on away goals)
Benfica (Por) v Marseille (Fra)
1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)
Hamburg (Ger) v Anderlecht (Blg)
3-1, 3-4 (agg 6-5)
Juventus (Ita) v Fulham (Eng)
3-1, 1-4 (agg 4-5)
Lille (Fra) v Liverpool (Eng)
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Panathinaikos (Gre) v Standard Liege (Blg)
1-3, 0-1 (agg 1-4)
Rubin Kazan (Rus) v Wolfsburg (Ger)
1-1, 1-2 (aet) (agg 2-3)
Valencia (Spa) v Werder Bremen (Ger)
1-1, 4-4 (agg 5-5; Valencia on away goals)

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Naftan 3-2 on penalties in the Super Cup with the game still goalless after extra time. Substitute Ihar Stasevich scored the winning spot-kick.

BELGIUM

Final for Gent

Gent are through to the Belgian Cup Final after beating Mechelen 3-2 on aggregate. They now face Cercle Brugge on May 15.

BULGARIA

"We'll quit," say CSKA

CSKA president Dimitar Borisov has threatened to pull the Sofia club out of the league after they were punished for a pitch invasion by their fans, claiming: "I am seriously considering taking CSKA out of the championship.

"It's so obvious that the BFU's [Bulgarian Football Union] officials took their decisions under pressure."

CSKA were awarded a 4-0 defeat after supporters caused the game at Lokomotiv Mezdra to be abandoned. The club were also ordered to play their next three home games at a neutral venue.

To add to their problems, CSKA coach Ioan Andone resigned after the goalless draw with bitter rivals Levski in Sofia's "eternal derby".

Elsewhere, referee Angel Angelov was suspended for the third time in three years following complaints about his performance in Levski's 3-1 win against nine-man Minyor.

The official's latest ban – for four matches – came after he awarded a 90th-minute penalty to Levski when Miroslav Antonov went down in the box despite seemingly minimal contact with the score at 1-1. Levski scored their third goal in injury time.

Pitch invaders...CSKA fans

AUSTRIA

Mar 6: Salzburg 1 Wiener Neustadt 1; Sturm 1 Ried 0; Austria Wien 0 LASK 1; Austria Karnten 2 Mattersburg 4.
Mar 7: Kapfenberger 2 Rapid 2.
Mar 12: LASK 0 Austria Karnten 0.
Mar 13: Salzburg 1 Kapfenberger 0; Ried 3 Mattersburg 0; Wiener Neustadt 0 Sturm 0.
Mar 14: Rapid 2 Austria Wien 0.
Mar 19: Kapfenberger 2 Wiener Neustadt 3.
Mar 20: Mattersburg 2 LASK 1; Sturm 1 Rapid 1; Austria Karnten 1 Ried 0.
Mar 21: Austria Wien 1 Salzburg 1.
Mar 23: Rapid 3 Mattersburg 0.
Mar 24: Salzburg 3 Sturm 0; Ried 0 Austria Wien 1; Wiener Neustadt 2 Austria Karnten 1; LASK 1 Kapfenberger 1.
Mar 27: Mattersburg 1 Salzburg 6; Kapfenberger 0 Sturm 3; Austria Wien 1 Wiener Neustadt 0; Austria Karnten 2 Rapid 4.
Mar 28: LASK 3 Ried 0.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	27	17	8	2	55	21	59
Rapid	27	15	8	4	60	30	53
Austria Wien	27	15	5	7	45	32	50
Sturm	27	13	8	6	42	24	47
W Neustadt	27	10	6	11	42	44	36
Mattersburg	27	10	3	14	35	54	33
Ried	27	8	7	12	29	29	31
LASK	27	7	8	12	51	62	29
Kapfenberger	27	6	6	15	32	52	24
A Karnten	27	2	5	20	21	64	11

BELGIUM

Regular season

Mar 6: Charleroi 0 Anderlecht 2; Cercle Brugge 4 Lokeren 0.
Mar 7: Germinal Beerschot 1 Zulte Waregem 1; Mechelen 2 Genk 1.
Mar 10: Charleroi 4 Lokeren 1.
Mar 14: Club Brugge 1 Roeselare 0; Anderlecht 2 Genk 0; Gent 2 Charleroi 1; Westerlo 2 Cercle Brugge 1; Kortrijk 3 Lokeren 1; Zulte Waregem 1 Standard 1; St Truiden 2 Germinal Beerschot 0.
Mar 21: Germinal Beerschot 1 Club Brugge 4; Roeselare 0 Westerlo 0; Cercle Brugge 3 St Truiden 1; Mechelen 2 Zulte Waregem 1; Standard 0 Gent 2; Genk 1 Kortrijk 1; Lokeren 0 Anderlecht 4.

BELGIUM – REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	28	22	3	3	62	20	69
Club Brugge	28	17	6	5	52	33	57
Gent	28	14	7	7	49	30	49
Kortrijk	28	12	9	7	39	30	45
St Truiden	28	12	6	10	35	35	42
Z Waregem	28	10	11	7	39	32	41
Mechelen	28	12	3	13	36	46	39
Standard	28	10	9	9	38	34	39
Cercle Brugge	28	11	5	12	45	40	38
Germinal B	28	9	8	11	30	43	35
Genk	28	8	10	10	33	31	34
Westerlo	28	8	8	12	28	34	32
Charleroi	28	5	8	15	28	45	23
Lokeren	28	5	3	20	22	54	18
Roeselare	28	4	6	18	29	58	18

Top six entered championship play-offs; teams placed 7th to 14th entered play-offs for a Europa League place; Roeselare, as the 15th-placed team, will enter the relegation/promotion play-off; Mouscron expelled from league because of financial problems – all results expunged

Championship play-offs

Mar 27: St Truiden 0 Club Brugge 0.
Mar 28: Kortrijk 1 Gent 2; Anderlecht 6 Zulte Waregem 0.

BELGIUM – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	1	1	0	0	6	0	38
Club Brugge	1	0	1	0	0	0	30
Gent	1	1	0	0	2	1	28
Kortrijk	1	0	0	1	1	2	23
St Truiden	1	0	1	0	0	0	22
Z Waregem	1	0	0	1	0	6	21

Teams carried forward half their points total (rounded up) from the regular season

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borac	20	13	2	5	26	12	41
Zeljeznicar	20	11	5	4	30	15	38
Siroki Brijeg	20	10	4	6	30	19	34
Sarajevo	20	10	4	6	25	18	34
Velez	20	10	3	7	36	21	33
Zrinjski	20	9	5	6	28	23	32
Leotar	20	9	2	9	21	28	29
Travnik	20	8	4	8	26	26	28
Olimpik	20	7	5	8	18	26	26
Rudar	20	7	4	9	17	19	25
Celik	20	7	3	10	22	24	24
Slavija	20	6	5	9	21	26	23
Zvijezda	20	7	2	11	19	32	23
Sloboda	20	7	2	11	14	27	23
Modrica	20	6	3	11	25	34	21
Laktasi	20	5	3	12	22	30	18

Standings on March 30

BULGARIA

Mar 5: Lokomotiv Mezdra 0 Slavia 0.
Mar 6: Lokomotiv Plovdiv 2 Chernomorets 1; Beroe 0 CSKA 0.
Mar 7: Pirin 4 Lovech 1; Montana 3 Botev 0 (awarded); Levski 3 Minyor 1; Sportist 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 5.
Mar 8: Sliven 0 Cherno More 0.
Mar 12: Minyor 1 Montana 1.
Mar 13: Lokomotiv Sofia 2 Lokomotiv Mezdra 1; Slavia 0 Pirin 0; Botev 0 Sliven 3 (awarded); CSKA 4 Sportist 1.
Mar 14: Cherno More 3 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 2; Lovech 3 Levski 0.
Mar 15: Chernomorets 0 Beroe 2.
Mar 19: Beroe 0 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 1; Botev 0 Cherno More 3 (awarded).
Mar 20: Montana 0 Lovech 0; Sportist 0 Chernomorets 0; Levski 3 Slavia 0.
Mar 21: Pirin 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 1; Lokomotiv Mezdra 4 CSKA 0 (awarded).
Mar 22: Sliven 1 Minyor 3.
Mar 23: Lokomotiv Plovdiv 3 Sportist 0.
Mar 24: Chernomorets 3 Lokomotiv Mezdra 0; Lokomotiv Sofia 2 Levski 0; Slavia 4 Montana 0; CSKA 1 Pirin 1.
Mar 25: Cherno More 0 Beroe 0; Minyor 3 Botev 0 (awarded); Lovech 1 Sliven 0.
Mar 27: Lokomotiv Mezdra 0 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 0; Levski 0 CSKA 0.
Mar 28: Sportist 1 Beroe 2; Minyor 1 Cherno More 0; Botev 0 Lovech 3 (awarded); Sliven 1 Slavia 2.
Mar 29: Montana 0 Lokomotiv Sofia 1; Pirin 1 Chernomorets 3.

BULGARIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lovech	21	15	3	3	39	13	48
Lok Sofia	21	13	5	3	38	20	44
CSKA	21	11	7	3	32	16	40
Levski	21	11	3	7	38	22	36
Minyor	21	11	3	7	31	18	36
Slavia	21	10	5	6	23	19	35
Chernomorets	21	10	4	7	30	21	34
Cherno More	21	9	6	6	27	17	33
Pirin	21	8	7	6	22	19	31
Beroe	21	8	7	6	22	21	31
Montana	21	5	7	9	18	26	22
Sliven	21	6	3	12	19	28	21
Lok Plovdiv	21	5	4	12	23	40	19
Lok Mezdra	21	5	3	13	21	37	18
Sportist	21	3	3	15	14	41	12
Botev*	21	1	4	16	12	51	1

**Botev expelled from league because of financial problems; all games since their expulsion are being awarded 3-0 wins to their opponents, and they also had six points deducted*

CROATIA

Mar 6: Varteks 0 Istra 2; Lokomotiva 1 Zagreb 0; Rijeka 1 Cibalia 1; Inter 0 Hajduk 3; Slaven 2 Sibenik 2; Zadar 1 Karlovac 1; Sesvete 2 Medimurje 1; Osijek 0 Dinamo 1.
Mar 12: Zagreb 3 Varteks 0.
Mar 13: Istra 1 Sesvete 0; Medimurje 1 Osijek 1; Dinamo 0 Zadar 0; Karlovac 0 Slaven 0; Sibenik 0 Inter 0; Cibalia 1 Lokomotiva 0; Hajduk 1 Rijeka 1.
Mar 19: Zagreb 1 Istra 1; Inter 0 Karlovac 1.
Mar 20: Varteks 1 Cibalia 1; Lokomotiva 2 Hajduk 1; Rijeka 0 Sibenik 1; Slaven 0 Dinamo 1; Zadar 2 Medimurje 0; Osijek 0 Sesvete 0.
Mar 27: Istra 1 Osijek 3; Sesvete 1 Zadar 2; Medimurje 1 Slaven 1; Dinamo 3 Inter 1; Karlovac 2 Rijeka 0; Sibenik 0 Lokomotiva 0; Hajduk 2 Varteks 0; Cibalia 1 Zagreb 0.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	22	16	4	2	62	11	52
Cibalia	22	12	8	2	32	10	44
Karlovac	22	11	7	4	24	13	40
Sibenik	22	11	7	4	22	20	40
Hajduk	22	11	5	6	35	16	38
Osijek	22	10	6	6	39	29	36
Lokomotiva	22	11	2	9	26	25	35
Slaven	22	8	8	6	33	35	32
Zadar	22	7	6	9	20	30	27
Rijeka	22	6	8	8	31	32	26
Medimurje	22	6	4	12	26	45	22
Inter	22	6	3	13	25	36	21
Varteks	22	5	6	11	20	35	21
Istra	22	5	5	12	21	37	20
Zagreb	22	5	4	13	29	39	19
Sesvete	22	2	5	15	20	52	11

CYPRUS

Regular season

Mar 6: Aris 2 AEP 1; Ermis 2 Doxa 1; APOP 1 APEP 2; ENP 1 Ethnikos 2.
Mar 7: Nea Salamina 0 Omonia 2; APOEL 1 AEL 0; Apollon 2 Anorthosis 0.
Mar 13: Ethnikos 0 Ermis 0; Doxa 0 Aris 0; AEP 0 Nea Salamina 1; APEP 1 ENP 2.
Mar 14: Anorthosis 2 APOP 1; Apollon 2 APOEL 0; Omonia 4 AEL 0.
Mar 20: Nea Salamina 0 Doxa 1; Ermis 2 APEP 1; Aris 0 Ethnikos 0.
Mar 21: AEL 3 AEP 1; ENP 1 Anorthosis 2; APOEL 1 Omonia 2; APOP 1 Apollon 3.

CYPRUS – REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia	26	19	5	2	52	21	62
Anorthosis	26	18	4	4	45	20	58
Apollon	26	17	6	3	43	15	57
APOEL	26	16	7	3	46	18	55
AEL	26	14	3	9	32	22	45
APOP	26	10	4	12	40	44	34
Ethnikos	26	8	7	11	23	31	31
ENP	26	7	8	11	29	35	29
Ermis	26	7	8	11	31	34	29
Doxa	26	6	8	12	25	37	26
AEP	26	6	8	12	27	40	26
Aris	26	4	8	14	26	47	20
N Salamina (R)	26	2	8	16	19	45	14
APEP* (R)	26	4	4	18	25	54	10

Top four entered championship play-offs; teams placed 5th to 8th entered "placement" play-offs; teams placed 9th to 12th entered relegation play-offs; 13th- and 14th-placed teams relegated automatically
**6pts deducted because APEP players walked off the pitch during the home game against Ethnikos – forcing its abandonment – in protest at refereeing decisions*

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mar 6: Teplice 2 Bohemians 1; Slovacko 0 Brno 2; Liberec 0 Plzen 2; Bohemians 1905 2 Olomouc 0.
Mar 7: Kladno 0 Sparta 1; Ostrava 4 Jablonec 1.
Mar 8: Slavia 3 Ceske Budejovice 2.
Mar 10: Teplice 2 Plzen 1.
Mar 13: Slavia 0 Teplice 0.
Mar 14: Ceske Budejovice 1 Liberec 1; Jablonec 1 Kladno 0; Plzen 3 Bohemians 1905 0; Bohemians 1 Slovacko 1; Mlada Boleslav 1 Sparta 2; Olomouc 3 Pribram 1.
Mar 15: Brno 1 Ostrava 1.
Mar 20: Kladno 1 Plzen 3; Sparta 4 Olomouc 0; Teplice 0 Brno 1; Liberec 2 Bohemians 3; Ostrava 0 Ceske Budejovice 1; Pribram 1 Jablonec 2.
Mar 21: Bohemians 1905 2 Mlada Boleslav 0.
Mar 22: Slovacko 3 Slavia 1.
Mar 24: Bohemians 0 Ostrava 3; Ceske Budejovice 0 Bohemians 1905 0; Olomouc 1 Mlada Boleslav 2; Plzen 3 Pribram 1; Brno 3 Kladno 0; Jablonec 0 Sparta 0.
Mar 25: Teplice 2 Slovacko 1; Slavia 0 Liberec 2.
Mar 27: Mlada Boleslav 4 Plzen 0.
Mar 28: Slovacko 1 Ceske Budejovice 0; Liberec 4 Jablonec 2; Pribram 3 Bohemians 2; Sparta 3 Brno 0; Bohemians 1905 1 Teplice 1; Kladno 2 Olomouc 3.
Mar 29: Ostrava 3 Slavia 1.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta	22	12	10	0	30	9	46
Teplice	22	12	8	2	36	21	44
Ostrava	22	12	6	4	34	19	42
Jablonec	22	12	5	5	26	21	41
Plzen	22	11	6	5	29	21	39
M Boleslav	21	9	4	8	35	27	31
Olomouc	22	9	4	9	35	28	31
Slavia	22	8	7	7	27	24	31
Brno	22	8	6	8	21	26	30
Liberec	22	8	3	11	27	31	27
Pribram	21	8	3	10	24	28	27
Boh'ians 1905	22	6	7	9	14	20	25
Slovacko	22	6	3	13	20	30	21
C Budejovice	22	4	8	10	17	26	20
Bohemians	22	4	2	16	22	44	14
Kladno	22	4	2	16	16	38	14

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Four...Lampard

ENGLAND

Pay up Pompey

Portsmouth look certain to be relegated after being docked nine points for becoming the first Premier League club to go into administration.

Pompey are having better luck in the FA Cup, where they face Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-finals. But if they were to go on and win the competition they could be declined entry to the Europa League as they have not applied for a UEFA club licence.

Their fellow relegation strugglers Hull City have tried to turn things around by replacing manager Phil Brown with Iain Dowie.

Elsewhere, Sunderland secured their first Premier League win since November courtesy of a Darren Bent hat trick in a 4-0 win at home to Bolton, while Chelsea's Frank Lampard went one better as he scored four times in a 7-1 thrashing of Aston Villa – two weeks before the two clubs met in the FA Cup semi-final.

FAROE ISLANDS

Ups and downs for HB

Champions HB Torshavn beat Vikingur 2-1 to win the Faroese Super Cup, before going out of the Faroese Cup, losing 1-0 to B36 Torshavn.

Lille man...Pierre-Alain Frau (17)

DENMARK

Mar 6: Midtjylland 2 OB 2.
Mar 7: Esbjerg 0 Randers 0; HB Koge 1 Silkeborg 4; Brondby 1 SonderjyskE 1; Copenhagen 5 AGF 0.
Mar 8: AaB 2 Nordsjaelland 1.
Mar 13: OB 1 SonderjyskE 1.
Mar 14: Esbjerg 2 HB Koge 1; Midtjylland 2 AaB 0; Randers 0 Nordsjaelland 0; Copenhagen 2 Brondby 0.
Mar 15: AGF 1 Silkeborg 2.
Mar 20: Silkeborg 0 Midtjylland 2.
Mar 21: HB Koge 0 AaB 3; OB 2 AGF 0; Nordsjaelland 1 Esbjerg 0; SonderjyskE 0 Copenhagen 2.
Mar 22: Brondby 1 Randers 1.
Mar 24: AaB 1 Silkeborg 0; Copenhagen 0 Nordsjaelland 2.
Mar 25: Brondby 1 HB Koge 3; Midtjylland 0 SonderjyskE 0; Esbjerg 1 OB 2; Randers 2 AGF 1.
Mar 27: Nordsjaelland 1 AaB 1.
Mar 28: Randers 4 Esbjerg 0; Silkeborg 3 HB Koge 0; SonderjyskE 1 Brondby 3; AGF 0 Copenhagen 0.
Mar 29: OB 1 Midtjylland 2.

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	23	14	5	4	40	13	47
OB	23	13	7	3	37	23	46
Silkeborg	23	11	5	7	39	25	38
Esbjerg	23	10	7	6	34	29	37
AaB	23	10	5	8	27	19	35
Brondby	23	9	5	9	41	40	32
Midtjylland	23	9	5	9	30	34	32
Nordsjaelland	23	9	4	10	26	27	31
AGF	23	7	7	9	26	34	28
SonderjyskE	23	6	7	10	18	25	25
Randers	23	3	8	12	20	35	17
HB Koge	23	2	5	16	20	54	11

ENGLAND

Saturday, March 6
Arsenal 3 (Fabregas 34, Walcott 60, Arshavin 90)
Burnley 1 (Nugent 50) Att: 60,043

West Ham 1 (Diamanti 88)
Bolton 2 (K Davies 10, Wilshere 16) Att: 33,824

Wolverhampton 0
Manchester United 1 (Scholes 72) Att: 28,883

Sunday, March 7
Everton 5 (Arteta 17, 39, Garcia og 51, Donovan 82, Rodwell 86)
Hull 1 (Cairney 31) Att: 34,682

Monday, March 8
Wigan 1 (Rodallega 35)
Liverpool 0 Att: 17,427

Tuesday, March 9
Portsmouth 1 (Kanu 90)
Birmingham 2 (Jerome 16, 42) Att: 18,465

Sunderland 4 (Campbell 1, Bent 64, pen 74, 88)
Bolton 0 Att: 36,087

Wednesday, March 10
Burnley 1 (Nugent 52)
Stoke 1 (Tuncay 23) Att: 20,323

Saturday, March 13
Birmingham 2 (Jerome 26, Gardner 51)
Everton 2 (Anichebe 19, Yakubu 22) Att: 24,579

Bolton 4 (Elmander 10, K Davies pen 48, Muamba 53, Taylor 69)
Wigan 0 Att: 20,053

Burnley 1 (Thompson 73)
Wolverhampton 2 (Jarvis 26, Carlisle og 47) Att: 21,217

Chelsea 4 (Alex 16, Drogba 56, 90, Malouda 77)
West Ham 1 (Parker 30) Att: 41,755

Hull 1 (Bullard pen 28)
Arsenal 2 (Arshavin 14, Bendtner 90) Att: 25,023

Stoke 0
Aston Villa 0 Att: 27,598

Tottenham 3 (Defoe 45, Pavlyuchenko 55, 85)
Blackburn 1 (Samba 80) Att: 35,474

Sunday, March 14
Manchester United 3 (Rooney 46, 84, Berbatov 89)
Fulham 0 Att: 75,207

Sunderland 1 (Jones 9)
Manchester City 1 (Johnson 90) Att: 41,398

Monday, March 15
Liverpool 4 (Fernando Torres 26, 77, Babel 28, Aquilani 32)
Portsmouth 1 (Belhadj 88) Att: 40,316

Tuesday, March 16
Wigan 1 (Caldwell 27)
Aston Villa 2 (McCarthy og 25, Milner 63) Att: 16,186

Saturday, March 20
Arsenal 2 (Denilson 5, Fabregas pen 83)
West Ham 0 Att: 60,077

Aston Villa 2 (Carew 16, 82)
Wolverhampton 2 (Craddock 23, Milner og 38) Att: 37,562

Everton 2 (Arteta 72, Pienaar 89)
Bolton 0 Att: 36,503

Portsmouth 3 (Smith 37, O'Hara 88, Kanu 89)
Hull 2 (Folan 27, 73) Att: 16,513

Stoke 1 (Etherington pen 64)
Tottenham 2 (Gudjohnsen 46, Kranjcar 77) Att: 27,575

Sunderland 3 (Bent 5, 11, Campbell 88)
Birmingham 1 (Jerome 60) Att: 37,962

Wigan 1 (Rodallega 90)
Burnley 0 Att: 18,498

Sunday, March 21
Blackburn 1 (Diouf 70)
Chelsea 1 (Drogba 6) Att: 25,554

Fulham 1 (Murphy pen 75)
Manchester City 2 (Santa Cruz 7, Tevez 36) Att: 25,359

Manchester United 2 (Rooney 12, Park 60)
Liverpool 1 (Fernando Torres 5) Att: 75,216

Tuesday, March 23
West Ham 1 (Franco 90)
Wolverhampton 3 (Doyle 28, Zubar 58, Jarvis 61) Att: 33,988

Wednesday, March 24
Aston Villa 1 (Carew 30)
Sunderland 1 (Campbell 22) Att: 37,473

Blackburn 2 (Dunn 5, 67)
Birmingham 1 (McFadden 55) Att: 23,856

Manchester City 0
Everton 2 (Cahill 33, Arteta 85) Att: 45,708

Portsmouth 0
Chelsea 5 (Drogba 32, 77, Malouda 50, 60, Lampard 90) Att: 18,753

Saturday, March 27
Birmingham 1 (Phillips 90)
Arsenal 1 (Nasri 81) Att: 27,039

Bolton 0
Manchester United 4 (Samuel og 38, Berbatov 69, 78, Gibson 82) Att: 25,370

Chelsea 7 (Lampard 15, pen 44, pen 62, 90, Malouda 57, 68, Kalou 83)
Aston Villa 1 (Carew 29) Att: 41,825

Hull 2 (Bullard pen 16, Fagan 48)
Fulham 0 Att: 24,361

Tottenham 2 (Crouch 27, Kranjcar 41)
Portsmouth 0 Att: 35,870

West Ham 0
Stoke 1 (Fuller 69) Att: 34,564

Wolverhampton 0
Everton 0 Att: 28,995

Sunday, March 28
Burnley 0
Blackburn 1 (Dunn pen 20) Att: 21,546

Liverpool 3 (Fernando Torres 3, 60, Johnson 32)
Sunderland 0 Att: 43,121

Monday, March 29
Manchester City 3 (Tevez 72, 74, 84)
Wigan 0 Att: 43,534

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	32	23	3	6	76	25	72
Chelsea	32	22	5	5	82	29	71
Arsenal	32	21	5	6	74	34	68
Tottenham	31	17	7	7	57	29	58
Man City	31	15	11	5	58	39	56
Liverpool	32	16	6	10	53	32	54
Aston Villa	31	13	12	6	43	32	51
Everton	32	13	10	9	50	42	49
Birmingham	32	12	9	11	33	37	45
Blackburn	32	11	8	13	35	50	41
Stoke	31	9	12	10	30	35	39
Fulham	31	10	8	13	33	36	38
Sunderland	32	8	11	13	41	50	35
Wolves	32	8	8	16	28	50	32
Bolton	32	8	8	16	36	60	32
Wigan	32	8	7	17	29	62	31
West Ham	32	6	9	17	38	55	27
Hull	31	6	9	16	31	64	27
Burnley	32	6	6	20	31	65	24
Portsmouth*	32	6	4	22	28	60	13

9pts deducted for going into administration

LEADING GOALSCORERS
26 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
24 Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
20 Darren Bent (Sunderland)

FA CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 6: Fulham 0 Tottenham 0; Portsmouth 2 Birmingham 0
Mar 7: Chelsea 2 Stoke 0; Reading 2 Aston Villa 4.

Replay
Mar 24: Tottenham 3 Fulham 1.

FRANCE

Saturday, March 6
Auxerre 1 (Jelen 38)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 9,473

Boulogne 0
Lyon 0 Att: 12,358

Lens 1 (Roudet 67)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Sessegnon 90) Att: 35,157

Nice 2 (Civelli 7, Ben Saada 35)
Nancy 3 (Bakar 5, Brison 27, Dia 90) Att: 7,504

Rennes 1 (Bocanegra 28)
Monaco 0 Att: 23,177

Saint-Etienne 1 (Riviere 17)
Lille 1 (Dumont 22) Att: 22,463

Sochaux 1 (Boudebouz 84)
Toulouse 0 Att: 14,055

Sunday, March 7
Bordeaux 1 (Chamakh 59)
Montpellier 1 (Costa 90) Att: 27,494

Grenoble 1 (Akrour 2)
Le Mans 1 (Maiga 50) Att: 12,828

Marseille 1 (Niang 43)
Lorient 1 (Koscielny 64) Att: 48,290

Wednesday, March 10
Bordeaux 1 (Tremoulinas 7)
Auxerre 2 (Jelen 64, 83) Att: 20,868

Saturday, March 13
Le Mans 0
Nice 1 (Remy 77) Att: 11,114

Lorient 1 (Marchal 79)
Lens 0 Att: 11,650

Lyon 1 (Lopez 79)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Riviere 39) Att: 36,199

Monaco 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 9,535

Montpellier 1 (Costa 66)
Auxerre 1 (Oliech 45) Att: 19,320

Nancy 1 (Malonga 41)
Boulogne 3 (Agouazi 33, Moussilou 71, Cuvillier 77) Att: 17,045

Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Hoarau 17, Erdinc 18, 35, 70)
Sochaux 1 (Boudebouz pen 64) Att: 29,249

Sunday, March 14
Lille 1 (Cesar og 47)
Grenoble 0 Att: 13,941

Toulouse 1 (Machado 39)
Marseille 1 (Brandao 30) Att: 27,249

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FRANCE

Bordeaux stay top

Although they lost 3-1 to Marseille in the League Cup Final, Bordeaux kept their place at the top of the table when second-place Montpellier lost 4-1 away to fourth-placed Lille. Along with Auxerre, they remain level on points with *Les Girondins* but have played two games more.

Relegation-threatened Nice sacked coach Didier Olle-Nicolle after the 3-2 home loss to Nancy and put the trio of Eric Roy, Rene Marsiglia and Frederic Gioria in temporary charge until the end of the season.

Olle-Nicolle is the third Ligue 1 coach to lose his job this term, after Paulo Duarte was sacked by Le Mans and Alain Perrin by Saint-Etienne.

Boulogne striker Matt Moussilou, who hadn't scored for almost three years, was on target in a 3-1 victory at Nancy as his side won for the first time in 13 games.

GERMANY

Late win for Bayern

Arjen Robben scored in extra time to give Bayern Munich a 1-0 victory at Schalke in the semi-finals of the German Cup. Bayern will meet holders Werder Bremen, who beat second-division Augsburg 2-0, in the Final on May 15.

When midfielder David Alaba came on as a substitute for Bayern Munich in their 1-1 draw at Koln, he became the Bavarian club's youngest-ever Bundesliga player at 17 years and 255 days.

Alaba had earlier made his name as Austria's youngest-ever international when he played in a World Cup qualifier against France in October.

Youngster...Alaba

Valenciennes 0
Rennes 2 (Marveaux 26, Gyan 39) Att: 11,116

Saturday, March 20
Auxerre 2 (Jelen 25, Pedretti 90+2)
Le Mans 1 (Helstad 90+1) Att: 10,159

Boulogne 2 (Marcq 13, Koscielny og 52)
Lorient 0 Att: 11,847

Grenoble 0
Monaco 0 Att: 12,949

Lens 0
Sochaux 0 Att: 33,354

Nice 1 (Remy 79)
Paris Saint-Germain 0
Match played behind closed doors as punishment for trouble caused by Nice fans away to Monaco

Rennes 4 (Hansson 31, Gyan 35, 46, Kembo-Ekoko 90)
Toulouse 1 (Braaten 51) Att: 18,865

Saint-Etienne 0
Nancy 0 Att: 26,177

Sunday, March 21
Bordeaux 3 (Ciani 40, Jussie pen 66, Gourcuff 76)
Lille 1 (Hazard 24) Att: 32,952

Marseille 2 (Kabore 67, Taiwo 81)
Lyon 1 (Gomis 80) Att: 52,557

Montpellier 2 (Montano 5, Marveaux 58)
Valenciennes 1 (Ben Khalfallah 74) Att: 16,183

Saturday, March 27
Lyon 2 (Michel Bastos 48, Delgado 90)
Grenoble 0 Att: 32,323

Sunday, March 28
Le Mans 1 (Dossevi 58)
Rennes 3 (Bangoura pen 51, Briand 74, 86) Att: 7,749

Lille 4 (Gervinho 17, Cabaye pen 54, Frau 58, Toure 79)
Montpellier 1 (Camara 46) Att: 16,545

Lorient 4 (Amalfitano 35, Gameiro 38, 73, Dubarbier 48)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 12,378

Nancy 5 (Dia 43, 45, 61, Hadji 60, Berenguer 68)
Lens 1 (Jemaa pen 90) Att: 16,231

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Lecointe og 27, Hoarau pen 35, Kezman 80)
Boulogne 0
Match played behind closed doors as punishment for previous crowd trouble at PSG's ground

Toulouse 0
Nice 2 (Mounier 41, Mouloungui 84) Att: 16,253

Monday, March 29
Monaco 0
Auxerre 0 Att: 2,500

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bordeaux	28	17	5	6	46	23	56
Montpellier	30	17	5	8	41	34	56
Auxerre	30	16	8	6	30	24	56
Lille	30	16	6	8	56	32	54
Lyon	30	15	9	6	49	31	54
Marseille	28	15	8	5	50	30	53
Rennes	30	14	7	9	45	29	49
Lorient	30	13	7	10	44	31	46
Monaco	30	13	6	11	32	33	45
Valenciennes	29	12	5	12	40	41	41
PSG	30	11	7	12	42	33	40
Nancy	30	11	6	13	38	43	39
Toulouse	30	10	8	12	29	28	38
Sochaux	28	10	6	12	23	35	36
Lens	30	9	8	13	27	37	35
Nice	30	10	5	15	31	45	35
Saint-Etienne	30	7	8	15	20	38	29
Boulogne	30	5	8	17	22	50	23
Le Mans	29	5	6	18	26	46	21
Grenoble	30	3	6	21	20	48	15

LEADING GOALSCORERS
15 Mamadou Niang (Marseille)
13 Nene (Monaco)

FRENCH CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 23: Auxerre 0 Paris Saint-Germain 0 (aet; PSG 6-5 on pens); Quevilly 3 Boulogne 1.
Mar 24: Lens 3 Saint-Etienne 1; Monaco 4 Sochaux 3 (aet).

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Mar 27 - Stade de France, Paris
Marseille 3 (Diawara 61, Valbuena 67, Chalme og 77)
Bordeaux 1 (Sane 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 75,000. **Ref:** Lannoy

GERMANY

Saturday, March 6
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Grosskreutz 13, Zidan 54, 70)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 79,800

Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Meier 52)
Schalke 4 (Matip 12, Howedes 15, Rakitic 80, Kuranyi 89) Att: 51,500

Freiburg 1 (Abdessadki 70)
Hannover 2 (Elson 63, Cisse og 73) Att: 19,100

Hamburg 1 (Jansen 40)
Hertha Berlin 0 Att: 53,905

Koln 1 (Podolski 31)
Bayern Munich 1 (Schweinsteiger 58) Att: 50,000

Werder Bremen 2 (Hugo Almeida 75, Frings pen 81)
Stuttgart 2 (Pogrebnyak 15, Khedira 43) Att: 36,664

Wolfsburg 4 (Dzeko 60, pen 79, Martins 75, Santana 90)
Bochum 1 (Freier 28) Att: 27,152

Sunday, March 7
1899 Hoffenheim 0
Mainz 1 (Bance 69) Att: 30,150

Nurnberg 3 (Choupo-Moting 42, 45, Tavares 55)
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Kiessling 66, Helmes 73) Att: 40,329

Friday, March 12
Schalke 2 (Edu 46, Kuranyi 55)
Stuttgart 1 (Tasci 50) Att: 61,673

Saturday, March 13
Bayern Munich 2 (Robben 76, pen 83)
Freiburg 1 (Makiadi 31) Att: 69,000

Bochum 1 (Holtby 53)
Borussia Dortmund 4 (Kehl 18, Zidan 27, Barrios 74, 77) Att: 30,748

Hannover 2 (Andreasen 14, Pinto 57)
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Altintop 45) Att: 38,847

Hertha Berlin 1 (Gekas 36)
Nurnberg 2 (Bunjaku 61, Charisteas 90) Att: 57,761

Mainz 1 (Schurrle 56)
Koln 0 Att: 20,300

Monchengladbach 0
Wolfsburg 4 (Misimovic 41, Dzeko pen 49, 80, Gentner 58) Att: 39,128

Sunday, March 14
Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Kiessling 22, 62, Derdiyok 55, Castro 84)
Hamburg 2 (Ze Roberto 33, Rozehnal 83) Att: 30,210

1899 Hoffenheim 0
Werder Bremen 1 (Pizarro 80) Att: 30,150

Friday, March 19
Koln 1 (Maniche 79)
Monchengladbach 1 (Reus 55) Att: 50,000

Saturday, March 20
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Barrios 50, 60, Rangelov 87)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 80,100

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Tsoumou 87, Fenin 89)
Bayern Munich 1 (Klose 6) Att: 51,500

Freiburg 1 (Flum 10)
Mainz 0 Att: 20,000

Nurnberg 0
1899 Hoffenheim 0 Att: 40,421

Stuttgart 2 (Marica 36, 54)
Hannover 0 Att: 41,000

Werder Bremen 3 (Pizarro 58, Marin 65, Frings 81)
Bochum 2 (Sestak 14, Dedic 63) Att: 36,197

Sunday, March 21
Hamburg 2 (Van Nistelrooy 40, Pitroipa 77)
Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 62, Rakitic pen 68) Att: 57,000

Wolfsburg 1 (Grafite 36)
Hertha Berlin 5 (Gekas 6, 26, 63, Ramos 8, 84) Att: 29,353

Friday, March 26
Bochum 1 (Holtby 10)
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Russ 29, Caio 64) Att: 24,221

Saturday, March 27
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 11, 27) Att: 30,210

Bayern Munich 1 (Olic 32)
Stuttgart 2 (Trasch 41, Marica 50) Att: 69,000

Hannover 1 (Cherundolo 81)
Koln 4 (Tosic 12, 71, Petit 21, Novakovic pen 28) Att: 43,218

Hertha Berlin 0
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 60,441

ESM
EUROPEAN SPORTS MAGAZINES

GOLDEN SHOE

UP TO AND INCLUDING MARCH 28 GAMES

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Wayne Rooney	Manchester United (Eng)	26	2	52
2	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	25	2	50
3	Didier Drogba	Chelsea (Eng)	24	2	48
4	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	23	2	46
5	Luis Suarez	Ajax (Hol)	29	1.5	43.5
6	Antonio Di Natale	Udinese (Ita)	21	2	42
7	Darren Bent	Sunderland (Eng)	20	2	40
8	Seydou Doumbia	Young Boys (Swi)	26	1.5	39
9	Shlomi Arbeitman	Maccabi Haifa (Isr)	25	1.5	37.5
10	Fernando Torres	Liverpool (Eng)	18	2	36
	Diego Milito	Internazionale (Ita)	18	2	36
	David Villa	Valencia (Spa)	18	2	36

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Semi clash...Feyenoord get to grips with Twente (in blue)

GREECE
Aris book place
Aris beat Kavala 4-2 on aggregate and will now meet either Giannina or Panathinaikos in the Greek Cup Final on April 24.

HOLLAND
Feyenoord triumph
Feyenoord came from a goal behind to beat Twente 2-1 and reach the Dutch Cup Final, with Giovanni Van Bronckhorst and sub Roy Makaay cancelling out Bryan Ruiz's opener. They will meet Ajax who beat Go Ahead Eagles 6-0 in the other semi.

ISRAEL
Cash problems
Be'er Sheva and Netanya face uncertain futures after their respective financial backers said they would stop funding the Premier League clubs at the end of this season.

Be'er Sheva's Alona Barkat, the only female boss of a top-flight club, made her decision after some of the club's fans forced coach Guy Azuri's car off the road following a poor result.

Azuri quit his position the following day and has been replaced until the end of the season by he club's youth academy director, Viko Hadad.

KAZAKHSTAN
Two out of three
Champions Aktobe won the Kazakh Super Cup for the second time in three years, beating Atyrau 2-0.

NORTHERN IRELAND
Spot-kick win for Glens
Glentoran defeated Coleraine 4-1 in a penalty shoot-out to

Mainz 0
Wolfsburg 2 (Dzeko 83, 90) Att: 19,700

Werder Bremen 4 (Mertesacker 1, 20, Borowski 36, Fritz 90)
Nurnberg 2 (Frantz 47, Choupo-Moting pen 63) Att: 36,123

Sunday, March 28
1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Simunic 80)
Freiburg 1 (Idrissou 64) Att: 30,150

Monchengladbach 1 (Brouwers 43)
Hamburg 0 Att: 52,269

GERMANY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Schalke	28	17	7	4	46	22	58
Bayern	28	16	8	4	55	26	56
B Leverkusen	28	14	11	3	56	30	53
B Dortmund	28	14	7	7	46	33	49
Werder	28	13	9	6	58	35	48
Hamburg	28	11	11	6	48	33	44
Stuttgart	28	11	8	9	41	36	41
E Frankfurt	28	11	8	9	37	40	41
Wolfsburg	28	11	7	10	52	51	40
Mainz	28	10	8	10	29	35	38
Hoffenheim	28	9	7	12	35	32	34
M'gladbach	28	9	7	12	36	47	34
Koln	28	7	10	11	27	35	31
Bochum	28	6	9	13	30	51	27
Nurnberg	28	6	7	15	26	47	25
Freiburg	28	6	6	16	26	50	24
Hannover	28	6	5	17	30	54	23
Hertha Berlin	28	4	7	17	27	48	19

LEADING GOALSCORERS
17 Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke)
16 Edin Dzeko (Wolfsburg)
16 Stefan Kiessling (Bayer Leverkusen)
15 Lucas Barrios (Borussia Dortmund)

GERMAN CUP – semi-finals
Mar 23: Werder Bremen 2 Augsburg 0.
Mar 24: Schalke 0 Bayern Munich 1.

GREECE

Mar 6: Kavala 1 Aris 1; PAOK 3 Panthrakikos 0; Larisa 1 AEK 0.
Mar 7: Ergotelis 1 Atromitos 1; Giannina 1 Asteras 0; Panionios 3 Xanthi 0; Panathinaikos 3 Levadiakos 0; Iraklis 1 Olympiakos 0.
Mar 13: Atromitos 2 Iraklis 1; AEK 3 Kavala 0; Olympiakos 2 Giannina 2.
Mar 14: Panthrakikos 0 Panionios 1; Levadiakos 2 Xanthi 1; Larisa 1 Ergotelis 0; Asteras 0 Panathinaikos 1; Aris 2 PAOK 0.
Mar 21: Ergotelis 1 Iraklis 3; Kavala 3 Larisa 3; Giannina 1 Atromitos 0; PAOK 0 AEK 1; Panathinaikos 0 Olympiakos 1; Panionios 1 Aris 1; Xanthi 2 Asteras 0; Levadiakos 2 Panthrakikos 0.
Mar 28: Kavala 1 Ergotelis 3; Iraklis 2 Giannina 0; Larisa 2 PAOK 1; Atromitos 0 Panathinaikos 3; AEK 1 Panionios 1; Olympiakos 0 Xanthi 0; Aris 1 Levadiakos 0; Asteras 3 Panthrakikos 1.

GREECE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panathinaikos	28	20	4	4	51	17	64
Olympiakos	28	17	7	4	43	17	58
PAOK	28	17	5	6	36	15	56
AEK	28	14	7	7	41	31	49
Aris	28	12	10	6	33	24	46
Kavala	28	10	8	10	30	30	38
Iraklis	28	10	7	11	37	35	37
Panionios	28	9	9	10	33	31	36
Atromitos	28	9	8	11	30	33	35
Larisa	28	9	7	12	27	40	34
Ergotelis	28	8	9	11	33	36	33
Asteras	28	9	6	13	27	33	33
Levadiakos	28	8	6	14	29	43	30
Xanthi	28	8	5	15	21	33	29
Giannina	28	7	7	14	26	42	28
Panthrakikos	28	3	3	22	20	57	12

HOLLAND

Mar 6: AZ 4 Heerenveen 1; Den Haag 1 Vitesse 1; Heracles 3 Willem II 2; NAC 2 PSV 1.
Mar 7: Roda JC 2 Feyenoord 4; Sparta 0 Ajax 3; Utrecht 1 NEC 0; RKC 0 Twente 1; Groningen 1 VVV 0.
Mar 12: Twente 3 Den Haag 1.
Mar 13: NAC 0 Groningen 3; VVV 0 Utrecht 1; AZ 6 RKC 2; NEC 0 Roda JC 2.
Mar 14: Feyenoord 1 Heracles 1; Vitesse 0 Heerenveen 1; Willem II 3 Sparta 1; Ajax 4 PSV 1.
Mar 19: Heerenveen 4 NEC 1.
Mar 20: Willem II 0 Utrecht 3; PSV 1 Twente 1; Heracles 3 NAC 0.
Mar 21: RKC 1 Ajax 5; Den Haag 0 VVV 0; Sparta 0 AZ 1; Groningen 1 Roda JC 0.
Mar 26: NAC 3 Den Haag 0.
Mar 27: Vitesse 2 Willem II 1; Roda JC 4 Heerenveen 2; AZ 3 Heracles 2; Twente 3 Sparta 0.
Mar 28: NEC 0 Feyenoord 0; Ajax 3 Groningen 0; Utrecht 2 RKC 0; VVV 2 PSV 4.

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Twente	29	23	5	1	55	22	74
Ajax	29	22	4	3	88	19	70
PSV	29	21	6	2	65	25	69
Feyenoord	28	14	10	4	43	26	52
AZ	29	16	3	10	57	33	51
Utrecht	29	13	9	7	33	26	48
Heracles	29	14	4	11	43	41	46
Groningen	29	12	6	11	39	39	42
NAC	29	11	7	11	40	46	40
Roda JC	29	10	5	14	39	52	35
Heerenveen	29	10	2	17	36	53	32
VVV	29	6	11	12	37	43	29
NEC	29	7	8	14	31	49	29
Vitesse	28	7	6	15	28	48	27
Sparta	29	6	7	16	27	52	25
Den Haag	29	5	9	15	28	51	24
Willem II	29	7	2	20	34	57	23
RKC	29	4	0	25	23	64	12

HUNGARY

HUNGARY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fehervar	20	14	4	2	45	21	46
Debrecen	20	14	1	5	42	27	43
Gyor	20	10	7	3	25	12	37
Zalaegerszeg	19	10	4	5	38	29	34
Ujpest	20	10	2	8	30	26	32
MTK	20	8	6	6	33	23	30
Kaposvar	20	7	6	7	28	27	27
Papa	20	8	3	9	27	28	27
Ferencvaros	20	6	8	6	25	27	26
Paks	19	5	8	6	21	24	23
Vasas	20	6	4	10	29	44	22
Kecskemet	20	6	3	11	31	40	21
Honved	20	5	6	9	22	26	21
Szombathely	20	5	4	11	26	39	19
Nyiregyhaza	20	4	6	10	25	40	18
Diosgyor	20	3	4	13	21	35	13

Standings on March 30

ISRAEL

ISRAEL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Haifa	28	24	1	3	62	12	73
H Tel Aviv	28	19	8	1	72	23	65
M Tel Aviv	28	14	7	7	46	32	49
Beitar	28	13	6	9	46	33	45
Bnei Yehuda	28	12	8	8	36	27	44
Ashdod	28	10	10	8	30	29	40
Be'er Sheva	28	9	9	10	41	48	36
Netanya	28	9	8	11	39	37	35
Bnei Sakhnin	28	9	8	11	25	29	35
M Petach Tikva	28	8	10	10	33	38	34
Ramat Gan	28	8	8	12	25	43	32
Hapoel Haifa	28	8	6	14	39	45	30
H Petach Tikva	28	5	13	10	20	38	28
Acre	28	4	12	12	28	41	24
Ahi Nazareth	28	5	6	17	26	65	21
Ra'anana	28	3	8	17	23	51	17

Standings on March 30

ITALY

Saturday, March 6
Fiorentina 1 (Marchionni 32)
Juventus 2 (Diego 2, Grosso 68) Att: 34,805

Roma 0
Milan 0 Att: 61,036

Sunday, March 7
Atalanta 0
Udinese 0 Att: 13,023

Bari 1 (Castillo 20)
Chievo 0 Att: 16,071

Bologna 2 (Zalayeta 7, Adailton 12)
Napoli 1 (Rinaudo 14) Att: 21,052

Cagliari 2 (Lazzari 9, Cossu 74)
Catania 2 (Mascara pen 31, Lopez 35) Att: 12,000

Inter 0
Genoa 0 Att: 51,795

Palermo 1 (Miccoli 81)
Livorno 0 Att: 25,108

Sampdoria 2 (Guberti 29, Pazzini 36)
Lazio 1 (Floccari 7) Att: 23,919

Siena 1 (Vergassola 69)
Parma 1 (Biabiany 34) Att: 10,151

Friday, March 12
Catania 3 (Lopez 74, Mascara pen 81, Martinez 90)
Inter 1 (Milito 54) Att: 21,000

Saturday, March 13
Napoli 1 (Lavezzi 47)
Fiorentina 3 (Gilardino 60, 87, Jovetic 90) Att: 16,000

Sunday, March 14
Bologna 1 (Raggi 90)
Sampdoria 1 (Gastaldello 86) Att: 18,573

Genoa 5 (Zapater pen 36, Palacio 39, Sculli 42, Rossi 45, Milanetto 59)
Cagliari 3 (Dessena 16, Conti 41, Matri pen 55) Att: 25,417

Juventus 3 (Del Piero 2, 7, Candreva 10)
Siena 3 (Maccarone 16, Ghezzal 46, pen 74) Att: 22,804

Lazio 0
Bari 2 (Almiron 51, Alvarez 64) Att: 35,000

Livorno 3 (Lucarelli 9, 26, pen 71)
Roma 3 (Perrotta 10, Toni 19, Pizarro 28) Att: 12,358

Milan 1 (Seedorf 90)
Chievo 0 Att: 37,866

Parma 1 (Bozhinov 71)
Atalanta 0 Att: 15,695

Udinese 3 (Floro Flores 43, 65, Asamoah 70)
Palermo 2 (Simplicio 51, Cavani 80) Att: 17,313

Saturday, March 20
Fiorentina 3 (Santana 4, Gilardino pen 73, Babacar 86)
Genoa 0 Att: 25,543

Palermo 1 (Cavani 24)
Inter 1 (Milito pen 11) Att: 35,753

Roma 4 (Toni 15, Vucinic 23, pen 66, 82)
Udinese 2 (Di Natale pen 38, 61) Att: 34,138

Sunday, March 21
Atalanta 3 (Padoin 13, Chevanton 49, Ferreira Pinto 54)
Livorno 0 Att: 31,412

Bari 1 (A Masiello 85)
Parma 1 (Belmonte og 36) Att: 17,305

Cagliari 0
Lazio 2 (Rocchi 4, Floccari 37) Att: 12,000

Chievo 1 (Pellissier 64)
Catania 1 (Lopez pen 74) Att: 8,578

Milan 1 (Inzaghi 26)
Napoli 1 (Campagnaro 13) Att: 51,044

Sampdoria 1 (Cassano 76)
Juventus 0 Att: 27,398

Siena 1 (Larrondo 10)
Bologna 0 Att: 11,621

Wednesday, March 24
Atalanta 3 (Tiribocchi 52, Valdes pen 64, 72)
Cagliari 1 (Conti 90) Att: 12,597

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Replacement...Kasperczak

win the Irish League Cup after the Final ended 2-2 following extra-time.

POLAND

Leaders change boss

League leaders Wisla replaced coach Maciej Skorza with Henryk Kasperczak after the champions struggled following the winter break.

Legia also dismissed their coach, Jan Urban, after a 1-0 loss at Polonia Bytom, their second successive league defeat, left them trailing behind Wisla. Stefan Bialas has taken charge of Legia until the end of the season.

On top...Benfica (in red)

PORTUGAL

Lions still going strong

Benfica closed in on their first league title since 2005 when they beat closest challengers Sporting Braga 1-0 in Lisbon with a goal from Brazil defender Luisao.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

New start for Cork

A crowd of 4,000 watched Cork City FORAS Co-op lose 2-0 to Waterford United. The new second-tier club came into being just days before the start of the season after Cork City were denied a licence.

Bari 2 (Meggiorini 58, Barreto 86)
Sampdoria 1 (Cassano 19) Att: 28,368

Bologna 0
Roma 2 (Riise 48, Julio Baptista 82) Att: 32,775

Catania 1 (Mascara 2)
Fiorentina 0 Att: 14,531

Genoa 2 (Bocchetti 75, Kharja pen 90)
Palermo 2 (Hernandez 34, Pastore 78) Att: 25,772

Inter 3 (Eto'o 36, 41, Maicon 61)
Livorno 0 Att: 53,086

Lazio 2 (Lichtsteiner 6, Cruz 72)
Siena 0 Att: 41,234

Parma 1 (Bozhinov 90)
Milan 0 Att: 20,493

Udinese 0
Chievo 0 Att: 14,950

Thursday, March 25
Napoli 3 (Hamsik 50, Quagliarella 72, Lavezzi 88)
Juventus 1 (Chiellini 7) Att: 52,249

Saturday, March 27
Palermo 3 (Miccoli 10, pen 43, 79)
Bologna 1 (Adailton 38) Att: 27,092

Roma 2 (De Rossi 17, Toni 72)
Inter 1 (Milito 66) Att: 61,898

Sunday, March 28
Chievo 0
Parma 0 Att: 8,841

Fiorentina 4 (Vargas 36, Gilardino 55, Santana 68, Jovetic 84)
Udinese 1 (Pepe 41) Att: 25,418

Juventus 2 (Del Piero 30, Felipe Melo 82)
Atalanta 1 (Amoruso 45) Att: 20,310

Livorno 1 (Tavano 85)
Bari 1 (Allegretti 24) Att: 9,225

Milan 1 (Borriello pen 18)
Lazio 1 (Lichtsteiner 32) Att: 40,393

Napoli 1 (Cannavaro 51)
Catania 0 Att: 31,642

Sampdoria 1 (Guberti 48)
Cagliari 1 (Nene 81) Att: 22,633

Siena 0
Genoa 0 Att: 13,029

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	31	18	9	4	58	28	63
Roma	31	18	8	5	56	35	62
Milan	31	17	9	5	49	29	60
Palermo	31	14	9	8	46	38	51
Napoli	31	12	12	7	41	36	48
Juventus	31	14	6	11	48	44	48
Sampdoria	31	13	9	9	38	37	48
Fiorentina	31	13	5	13	43	36	44
Genoa	31	12	8	11	51	51	44
Bari	31	11	10	10	38	37	43
Parma	31	11	9	11	31	38	42
Cagliari	31	11	7	13	48	47	40
Chievo	31	10	8	13	27	29	38
Catania	31	8	11	12	34	36	35
Bologna	31	9	8	14	34	44	35
Lazio	31	7	12	12	27	33	33
Udinese	31	8	8	15	38	49	32
Atalanta	31	7	7	17	29	42	28
Siena	31	6	8	17	32	53	26
Livorno	31	6	7	18	21	47	25

LEADING GOALSCORERS
21 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
18 Diego Milito (Inter)
15 Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina)

MACEDONIA

MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Renova	21	16	3	2	46	18	51
Rabotnicki	21	13	4	4	39	20	43
Metalurg	21	9	9	3	30	16	36
Pelister	21	9	5	7	23	21	32
Sileks	21	7	7	7	28	28	28
Turnovo*	21	7	4	10	26	30	22
Pobeda*	21	7	4	10	27	33	22
Teteks	21	6	3	12	26	29	21
Vardar*	21	6	4	11	21	27	19
Milano	21	2	2	17	13	68	8
Makedonija**	11	5	5	1	23	5	0
Sloga**	11	3	2	6	9	16	0

Standings on March 30
**3pts deducted - Pobeda for failing to respect a league ruling; Turnovo and Vardar for failing to fulfil a fixture*
***Makedonija and Sloga expelled from league after failing to fulfil two consecutive fixtures; forfeited all points gained*

MOLDOVA

MOLDOVA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff	24	19	2	3	59	6	59
Iskra-Stal	24	15	4	5	38	21	49
Dacia	24	13	7	4	42	19	46
Zimbru	24	12	6	6	34	24	42
Olimpia	24	11	8	5	32	17	41
Academia	24	8	8	8	29	30	32
CSCA-Rapid	24	8	5	11	20	32	29
Viitorul	24	8	4	12	23	30	28
Tiraspol	24	6	7	11	16	23	25
Dinamo	24	6	4	14	26	49	22
S Gheorghe	24	4	4	16	18	47	16
Nistru	24	2	5	17	10	49	11

Standings on March 30

NORWAY

Mar 13: Brann 0 Haugesund 0.
Mar 14: Start 2 Sandefjord 0; Stromsgodset 2 Kongsvinger 0; Tromso 2 Honefoss 0; Odd Grenland 2 Stabaek 3; Aalesund 3 Lillestrom 0; Molde 1 Rosenborg 2.
Mar 15: Valerenga 2 Viking 0.
Mar 20: Stabaek 1 Valerenga 1.
Mar 21: Sandefjord 3 Molde 1; Lillestrom 2 Tromso 0; Honefoss 0 Aalesund 2; Kongsvinger 1 Odd Grenland 2; Haugesund 2 Stromsgodset 2; Viking 4 Brann 0.
Mar 22: Rosenborg 3 Start 3.
Mar 27: Start 1 Molde 1.
Mar 28: Lillestrom 6 Honefoss 0; Stromsgodset 2 Viking 1; Tromso 1 Kongsvinger 0; Odd Grenland 4 Haugesund 1; Aalesund 2 Stabaek 2; Valerenga 0 Rosenborg 0.
Mar 29: Brann 3 Sandefjord 2.

NORWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Aalesund	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Stromsgodset	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Lillestrom	3	2	0	1	8	3	6
Odd Grenland	3	2	0	1	8	5	6
Tromso	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Start	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
Valerenga	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Stabaek	3	1	2	0	6	5	5
Rosenborg	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Brann	3	1	1	1	3	6	4
Viking	3	1	0	2	5	4	3
Sandefjord	3	1	0	2	5	6	3
Haugesund	3	0	2	1	3	6	2
Molde	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Kongsvinger	3	0	0	3	1	5	0
Honefoss	3	0	0	3	0	10	0

POLAND

Mar 5: Korona 1 Polonia Bytom 0; Wisla 0 Arka 1.
Mar 6: Slask 1 Jagiellonia 2; Lech 3 Cracovia 1; Lechia 1 Polonia Warsaw 1; Ruch 0 Zaglebie 2.
Mar 7: Legia 0 Odra 1; Piast 1 Belchatow 2.
Mar 12: Odra 2 Piast 0; Jagiellonia 0 Wisla 0.
Mar 13: Cracovia 3 Korona 0; Polonia Warsaw 1 Ruch 1; Polonia Bytom 1 Legia 0; Slask 1 Lechia 2.
Mar 14: Arka 0 Zaglebie 2; Belchatow 1 Lech 1.
Mar 19: Arka 2 Cracovia 0; Ruch 1 Belchatow 0.
Mar 20: Legia 1 Slask 1; Wisla 3 Lechia 0; Korona 1 Odra 1; Zaglebie 2 Polonia Warsaw 0.
Mar 21: Piast 1 Polonia Bytom 0; Lech 2 Jagiellonia 0.
Mar 26: Belchatow 1 Zaglebie 3; Lechia 2 Legia 3.
Mar 27: Polonia Warsaw 2 Arka 1; Polonia Bytom 1 Wisla 3; Slask 1 Korona 1; Cracovia 1 Ruch 4.
Mar 28: Jagiellonia 2 Piast 0; Odra 0 Lech 0.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wisla	22	15	2	5	37	16	47
Lech	22	12	7	3	36	18	43
Legia	22	12	6	4	28	13	42
Ruch	22	13	3	6	32	20	42
Belchatow	22	10	5	7	25	21	35
Lechia	22	8	7	7	23	23	31
Polonia B	22	7	7	8	22	21	28
Zaglebie	22	7	6	9	22	28	27
Slask	22	6	8	8	23	23	26
Jagiellonia*	22	8	9	5	24	20	23
Korona	22	5	8	9	25	35	23
Cracovia	22	6	5	11	19	31	23
Arka	22	5	6	11	18	25	21
Piast	22	5	5	12	24	36	20
Odra	22	5	5	12	17	29	20
Polonia W	22	5	5	12	17	33	20

**10pts deducted for involvement in a corruption scandal*

PORTUGAL

Mar 2: Nacional 1 Belenenses 0.
Mar 5: Uniao Leiria 2 Leixoes 1.
Mar 6: Porto 2 Olhanense 2; Rio Ave 0 Naval 0; Setubal 0 Sporting Braga 0.
Mar 7: Maritimo 0 Academica 0; Belenenses 0 Sporting Lisbon 4; Benfica 3 Pacos Ferreira 1.
Mar 8: Guimaraes 2 Nacional 0.
Mar 12: Naval 1 Uniao Leiria 0.
Mar 13: Sporting Braga 1 Rio Ave 0; Academica 1 Porto 2.
Mar 14: Olhanense 1 Belenenses 3; Leixoes 1 Setubal 2; Nacional 0 Benfica 1; Sporting Lisbon 3 Guimaraes 1.
Mar 15: Pacos Ferreira 1 Maritimo 0.
Mar 26: Maritimo 3 Sporting Lisbon 2.
Mar 27: Benfica 1 Sporting Braga 0; Guimaraes 1 Academica 0.
Mar 28: Leixoes 1 Naval 0; Setubal 2 Nacional 1; Uniao Leiria 2 Pacos Ferreira 1; Belenenses 0 Porto 3; Rio Ave 1 Olhanense 5.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	24	19	4	1	61	12	61
S Braga	24	17	4	3	34	15	55
Porto	24	15	5	4	50	21	50
Sporting L	24	10	8	6	32	20	38
Guimaraes	24	10	6	8	25	25	36
Uniao Leiria	24	9	6	9	30	27	33
P Ferreira	24	8	8	8	28	28	32
Maritimo	24	8	6	10	32	34	30
Naval	24	8	5	11	14	25	29
Nacional	24	8	5	11	28	41	29
Rio Ave	24	6	10	8	21	25	28
Academica	24	6	6	12	27	34	24
Setubal	24	5	8	11	22	43	23
Olhanense	24	4	11	9	24	34	23
Leixoes	24	4	6	14	20	41	18
Belenenses	24	2	8	14	13	36	14

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Mar 21 - Algarve stadium, Sao Joao da Venda
Benfica 3 (Ruben Amorim 10, Carlos Martins 45, Cardozo 90)
Porto 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Sousa

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Patrick's	4	3	1	0	7	0	10
Bohemians	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
Dundalk	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Fingal	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Sligo	4	1	3	0	3	2	6
UCD	4	2	0	2	5	5	6
Shamrock	4	1	1	2	2	5	4
Galway	4	1	0	3	2	5	3
Drogheda	4	0	1	3	5	13	1
Bray	4	0	0	4	2	7	0

Standings on March 30

ROMANIA

Mar 5: Rapid 1 Timisoara 0.
Mar 6: Gloria 3 Astra 1; Dinamo 1 Ceahlaul 1.
Mar 7: Gaz Metan 0 International 0; Otelul 1 CFR 0; Politehnica 1 Alba Iulia 0; Urziceni 2 Steaua 2.
Mar 8: Brasov 1 Vaslui 1; Pandurii 0 Universitatea 0.
Mar 12: Ceahlaul 0 Gaz Metan 0; Astra 1 Politehnica 1; Steaua 1 Otelul 0.
Mar 13: Universitatea 3 Brasov 0; International 0 Pandurii 0; CFR 2 Dinamo 2.

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Decider...Bukharov

ROMANIA

Relegation job

Former Bosnia-Herzegovina coach Blaz Sliskovic has agreed a three-month contract to take over at bottom of the league Alba Iulia.

RUSSIA

Gone after one game

Former international defender Omari Tetradze quit as coach of Premier League newcomers Anzhi just one game into the new season.

"I'm just too tired mentally. I miss my wife and my daughter," said the 40-year-old, whose side drew 0-0 at home to Spartak Nalchik in their opening game.

Aleksandr Bukharov scored the only goal of the game as Rubin Kazan beat CSKA Moscow to win the Russian Super Cup.

Success...Rangers' Kenny Miller

SCOTLAND

Mixed fortunes

Despite finishing the game with only nine men, Rangers beat St Mirren 1-0 to win the Scottish League Cup Final.

St Mirren had better luck three days later when they won 4-0 at home to Celtic. It was the visitors' heaviest league defeat outside of the Old Firm environment in 30 years and cost manager Tony Mowbray

Mar 14: Alba Iulia 0 Rapid 1; Vaslui 0 Gloria 1; Timisoara 0 Urziceni 0.
Mar 16: Brasov 1 International 2.
Mar 17: Pandurii 0 Ceahlaul 0; Gaz Metan 0 CFR 0; Gloria 2 Universitatea 1; Dinamo 2 Steaua 0.
Mar 18: Timisoara 6 Alba Iulia 0; Rapid 0 Astra 1; Politehnica 1 Vaslui 3; Urziceni 0 Otelul 0.
Mar 20: Ceahlaul 2 Brasov 1; CFR 1 Pandurii 0.
Mar 21: Universitatea 2 Politehnica 1; International 2 Gloria 1; Steaua 2 Gaz Metan 0; Otelul 2 Dinamo 3.
Mar 22: Vaslui 1 Rapid 0; Astra 1 Timisoara 3; Alba Iulia 1 Urziceni 2.
Mar 26: Gaz Metan 0 Otelul 1; Pandurii 0 Steaua 0.
Mar 27: Politehnica 0 International 0; Alba Iulia 2 Astra 1; Rapid 0 Universitatea 1.
Mar 28: Gloria 1 Ceahlaul 0; Urziceni 4 Dinamo 4.
Mar 29: Brasov 0 CFR 1; Timisoara 0 Vaslui 1.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR	24	13	7	4	29	14	46
Vaslui	24	13	5	6	33	23	44
Steaua	24	12	7	5	32	22	43
Timisoara	24	11	9	4	40	16	42
Dinamo	24	11	9	4	36	23	42
Urziceni	24	11	9	4	34	22	42
Rapid	24	11	5	8	40	27	38
Otelul	24	10	5	9	27	28	35
Brasov	24	8	7	9	25	23	31
Gloria	24	7	9	8	23	29	30
Astra	24	7	7	10	28	33	28
Gaz Metan	24	6	10	8	20	30	28
Universitatea	24	8	3	13	33	34	27
Politehnica	24	7	5	12	22	34	26
International	24	7	4	13	21	37	25
Pandurii	24	5	9	10	15	22	24
Ceahlaul	24	4	7	13	19	40	19
Alba Iulia	24	4	5	15	22	42	17

RUSSIA

Mar 12: CSKA 1 Amkar 0.
Mar 13: Krylia Sovetov 0 Zenit 1; Anzhi 0 Spartak Nalchik 0; Rostov 0 Tom 2.
Mar 14: Sibir 0 Terek 2; Alania 1 Saturn 1; Rubin 2 Lokomotiv 0; Spartak Moscow 0 Dynamo 1.
Mar 19: Spartak Nalchik 2 Alania 1.
Mar 20: Amkar 1 Anzhi 0; Terek 1 Rostov 1; Saturn 1 Sibir 1; Lokomotiv 3 Krylia Sovetov 0.
Mar 21: Zenit 1 Spartak Moscow 1; CSKA 0 Dynamo 0.
Mar 22: Tom 0 Rubin 1.
Mar 26: Anzhi 1 CSKA 2; Alania 0 Amkar 0.
Mar 27: Sibir 0 Spartak Nalchik 2; Krylia Sovetov 2 Tom 3; Dynamo 1 Zenit 2.
Mar 28: Spartak Moscow 2 Lokomotiv 1; Rubin 0 Terek 0; Rostov 1 Saturn 0.

RUSSIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spartak N	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Rubin	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Zenit	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
CSKA	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Tom	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Terek	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Spartak M	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Dynamo	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Amkar	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Rostov	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Lokomotiv	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Alania	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Saturn	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Anzhi	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Sibir	3	0	1	2	1	5	1
Krylia Sovetov	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

SCOTLAND

Mar 6: Hibernian 1 Kilmarnock 0; Hamilton 1 Aberdeen 1; Rangers 3 St Mirren 1; St Johnstone 1 Motherwell 2.
Mar 7: Falkirk 0 Celtic 2; Dundee United 1 Hearts 0.
Mar 9: Kilmarnock 0 Rangers 2; St Mirren 0 Motherwell 0.
Mar 13: Hamilton 1 St Mirren 0; Falkirk 1 St Johnstone 2; Motherwell 3 Hearts 1.
Mar 16: St Johnstone 1 Aberdeen 0.
Mar 20: Hearts 2 Hibernian 1; Aberdeen 2 Dundee United 2; Celtic 3 St Johnstone 0; Hamilton 2 Falkirk 2.
Mar 22: St Johnstone 1 Falkirk 1.
Mar 24: Kilmarnock 1 Hamilton 2; St Mirren 4 Celtic 0.
Mar 27: Hearts 1 Rangers 4; Aberdeen 2 St Mirren 1; Celtic 3 Kilmarnock 1; Dundee United 3 Motherwell 0; Falkirk 1 Hibernian 3; Hamilton 1 St Johnstone 0.

SCOTLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	29	21	7	1	68	17	70
Celtic	31	18	6	7	59	34	60
Dundee Utd	30	14	10	6	46	37	52
Hibernian	30	14	8	8	44	34	50
Motherwell	31	12	12	7	38	35	48
Hearts	31	11	7	13	30	38	40
St Johnstone	30	9	8	13	43	51	35
Aberdeen	30	8	10	12	29	38	34
Hamilton	31	8	9	14	25	41	33
St Mirren	31	6	9	16	30	42	27
Kilmarnock	31	6	8	17	24	43	26
Falkirk	31	4	10	17	27	53	22

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Mar 21 - Hampden Park, Glasgow
St Mirren 0
Rangers 1 (Miller 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 44,538. **Ref:** Thomson
Sent off: Thomson 53min, Wilson 71min (both Rangers)

SERBIA

Mar 6: Jagodina 3 OFK 2; BSK 2 Borac 0; Napredak 2 Smederevo 2; Metalac 3 Vojvodina 1; Spartak 2 Mladi Radnik 0.
Mar 7: Rad 1 Red Star 2; Cukaricki 2 Hajduk 0; Partizan 0 Javor 0.
Mar 13: Javor 1 BSK 0; Red Star 2 Napredak 1.
Mar 14: Hajduk 0 Partizan 2; OFK 3 Rad 2; Smederevo 0 Metalac 1; Vojvodina 4 Cukaricki 0; Mladi Radnik 0 Jagodina 0.
Mar 17: Borac 1 Spartak 2.
Mar 20: Spartak 0 Javor 0; Jagodina 0 Borac 1; BSK 3 Hajduk 0; Partizan 3 Cukaricki 0; Napredak 1 OFK 2; Metalac 2 Red Star 1; Smederevo 1 Vojvodina 0.
Mar 21: Rad 3 Mladi Radnik 2.
Mar 24: Vojvodina 1 Partizan 2; Mladi Radnik 1 Napredak 1; Cukaricki 1 BSK 0; Javor 0 Jagodina 0; Borac 0 Rad 0; Hajduk 2 Spartak 1; OFK 3 Metalac 2; Red Star 2 Smederevo 1.
Mar 27: Metalac 1 Mladi Radnik 0; Smederevo 0 OFK 1; Napredak 2 Borac 0; BSK 1 Partizan 2; Spartak 1 Cukaricki 0; Jagodina 2 Hajduk 0.
Mar 28: Rad 3 Javor 2; Red Star 3 Vojvodina 0.

SERBIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	21	18	1	2	40	11	55
Partizan	21	16	5	0	43	12	53
Spartak	21	10	6	5	26	16	36
OFK	21	11	3	7	28	22	36
Vojvodina	21	9	3	9	30	21	30
Metalac	21	9	3	9	18	24	30
Jagodina	21	8	5	8	23	22	29
Javor	21	5	11	5	16	17	26
Smederevo	21	7	5	9	21	25	26
Borac	21	7	2	12	15	28	23
Rad	21	5	7	9	24	30	22
BSK	21	6	4	11	17	24	22
Napredak	21	5	6	10	21	27	21
Mladi Radnik	21	4	9	8	15	25	21
Hajduk	21	5	5	11	20	31	20
Cukaricki	21	4	3	14	15	37	15

SLOVAKIA

SLOVAKIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan	25	17	4	4	42	17	55
Zilina	25	17	2	6	38	14	53
Dukla	25	12	8	5	33	22	44
Nitra	25	10	6	9	27	24	36
Spartak	25	10	5	10	41	30	35
Tatran	25	10	4	11	25	26	34
Ruzomberok	25	9	7	9	25	27	34
Senica	25	9	5	11	23	32	32
Petrzalka	25	6	6	13	27	34	24
DAC	25	5	9	11	20	35	24
Dubnica	25	6	6	13	18	35	24
Kosice	25	5	6	14	24	47	21

Standings on March 30

SLOVENIA

SLOVENIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Koper	27	16	8	3	43	25	56
Maribor	27	15	4	8	50	37	49
Nafta	27	12	5	10	40	39	41
Gorica	27	10	7	10	46	43	37
Celje	27	10	6	11	40	45	36
Rudar	27	11	2	14	35	41	35
Olimpija*	27	10	6	11	34	27	34
Interblock	27	9	5	13	31	36	32
Domzale	27	8	6	13	35	46	30
Drava	27	6	7	14	27	42	25

Standings on March 30
**2pts deducted for missing a game last season*

SPAIN

Saturday, March 6
Almeria 2 (Cisma 12, Puyol og 57)
Barcelona 2 (Messi 42, 66) Att: 15,000

Deportivo La Coruna 3 (Juan Rodriguez 33, Guardado 55, Colotto 67)
Tenerife 1 (Juanlu 17) Att: 12,000

Real Madrid 3 (Cristiano Ronaldo 60, Sergio Ramos 64, Van der Vaart 90)
Sevilla 2 (Xabi Alonso og 10, Dragutinovic 52) Att: 79,000

Sunday, March 7
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Toquero 27, 37)
Valladolid 0 Att: 37,000

Espanyol 0
Villarreal 0 Att: 26,345

Malaga 2 (Duda 40, Valdo 55)
Xerez 4 (Momo pen 5, 72, Leandro Gioda 76, Orellana 90) Att: 23,000

Mallorca 3 (Julio Alvarez 12, Victor 76, Webo 89)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 12,700

Osasuna 0
Getafe 0 Att: 16,348

Zaragoza 1 (Jarosik 7)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Balde 90) Att: 24,000

Monday, March 8
Valencia 0
Racing Santander 0 Att: 35,000

Saturday, March 13
Getafe 3 (Parejo 32, Miku 80, Manu pen 85)
Mallorca 0 Att: 11,000

Sevilla 1 (Fazio 21)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Adrian 24) Att: 40,000

Sporting Gijon 0
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 20,000

Sunday, March 14
Almeria 1 (Soriano 56)
Malaga 0 Att: 10,000

Barcelona 3 (Messi 56, 81, 83)
Valencia 0 Att: 87,601

Racing Santander 0
Zaragoza 0 Att: 16,212

Tenerife 4 (Richi 20, Nino 50, 90, Alfaro 82)
Espanyol 1 (Verdu 70) Att: 17,000

Valladolid 1 (Albiol og 58)
Real Madrid 4 (Cristiano Ronaldo 28, Higuain 45, 52, 65) Att: 22,000

Villarreal 2 (Llorente 33, Escudero 90)
Xerez 0 Att: 17,000

Monday, March 15
Atletico Madrid 1 (Jurado 79)
Osasuna 0 Att: 25,000

Saturday, March 20
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Orbaiz 13, Llorente pen 79)
Getafe 2 (Manu 32, Pedro Leon 86) Att: 35,000

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Valladolid 2 (Nauzet 40, Medunjanin 90) Att: 27,000

Espanyol 2 (Osvaldo 8, 60)
Sevilla 0 Att: 24,112

Real Madrid 3 (Van der Vaart 55, Xabi Alonso 57, Higuain 68)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Barral 53) Att: 75,000

Xerez 2 (Bermejo 6, Aythami 15)
Tenerife 1 (Nino 49) Att: 16,668

Sunday, March 21
Malaga 2 (Baha 64, 84)
Villarreal 0 Att: 25,000

Mallorca 4 (Victor 10, Aduriz 28, Perea og 86, Mattioni 90)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Forlan 26) Att: 13,000

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his job. Former club captain Neil Lennon has been placed in charge temporarily.

SERBIA

Fourth time lucky?

Milan Djuricic became Vojvodina's fourth coach this season, following in the footsteps of Dragoslav Stepanovic, Zlatomir Zagorcic and Branko Babic.

Djuricic's side host Partizan in the Serbian Cup semi-finals, with the winner meeting Red Star or OFK in the Final.

TURKEY

Pitch invasion

The game between Istanbul BB and Diyarbakirspor was abandoned when visiting supporters invaded the pitch.

It was the second consecutive match involving Diyarbakirspor to be halted due to crowd trouble following clashes at the home game against Bursaspor in Diyarbakir, the biggest city in the troubled Kurdish south east. Bursaspor went top after being awarded a 3-0 win.

Tolunay Kafkas, who led Kayserispor to victory in the 2008 Turkish Cup, has said he will leave the club when his contract expires at the end of the season. Mesut Bakkal, who was dismissed by Manisaspor in January, has replaced Muhsin Ertugral at fellow strugglers Sivasspor.

Trouble...Diyarbakirspor

UKRAINE

Donetsk derby

Goals from Musawengosi Mguni and Velizar Dimitrov secured Metalurh Donetsk a 2-1 win over rivals Shakhtar and a first appearance in the Ukraine Cup Final.

Osasuna 1 (Miguel Flano 32)
Racing Santander 3 (Colsa 35, Christian 51, Diop 89) Att: 16,614

Valencia 2 (Mata 63, Silva 70)
Almeria 0 Att: 30,000

Zaragoza 2 (Colunga 85, 89)
Barcelona 4 (Messi 5, 66, 78, Ibrahimovic pen 90) Att: 30,000

Tuesday, March 23
Sevilla 1 (Kanoute pen 63)
Xerez 1 (Leandro Gioda 90) Att: 40,000

Sporting Gijon 2 (Bilic 30, Diego Castro pen 90)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Adrian 65) Att: 18,000

Wednesday, March 24
Almeria 1 (Uche 61)
Zaragoza 0 Att: 15,772

Barcelona 2 (Ibrahimovic 73, Bojan 88)
Osasuna 0 Att: 86,000

Racing Santander 0
Mallorca 0 Att: 16,000

Tenerife 2 (Nino 60, Culebras 76)
Villarreal 2 (Nilmar 45, Rossi 88)

Valencia 1 (Villa 13)
Malaga 0 Att: 35,000

Valladolid 0
Espanyol 0 Att: 16,062

Thursday, March 25
Atletico Madrid 2 (Forlan 54, Aguero 86)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 20,000

Getafe 2 (Parejo 38, Pedro Leon 80)
Real Madrid 4 (Cristiano Ronaldo 13, 37, Higuain 20, 23) Att: 15,000

Saturday, March 27
Malaga 1 (Apono 66)
Tenerife 1 (Alfaro pen 85) Att: 25,000

Mallorca 0
Barcelona 1 (Ibrahimovic 63) Att: 19,600

Zaragoza 3 (Diogo 41, Arizmendi 63, Jarosik 71)
Valencia 0 Att: 27,000

Sunday, March 28
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Riki 71)
Getafe 3 (Miku 21, 57, Ze Castro og 32) Att: 14,000

Espanyol 0
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 26,724

Osasuna 1 (Pandiani 20)
Almeria 0 Att: 16,421

Real Madrid 3 (Xabi Alonso 49, Arbeloa 55, Higuain 62)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Reyes 10, Forlan pen 68) Att: 83,000

Villarreal 3 (Rossi 5, Llorente 18, Pires 90)
Sevilla 0 Att: 18,000

Xerez 3 (Victor Sanchez 2, Michel 36, Bermejo pen 72)
Valladolid 0 Att: 13,438

Monday, March 29
Athletic Bilbao 4 (Llorente 13, pen 78, Toquero 18, Susaeta 88)
Racing Santander 3 (Tchite 41, Bolado 81, 90) Att: 30,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	29	24	2	3	81	26	74
Barcelona	29	23	5	1	71	18	74
Valencia	29	15	8	6	45	32	53
Mallorca	29	14	5	10	45	33	47
Sevilla	29	13	6	10	40	35	45
Ath Bilbao	29	13	6	10	40	37	45
Dep Coruna	29	12	6	11	32	35	42
Villarreal	29	11	7	11	43	41	40
Getafe	29	12	4	13	41	39	40
At Madrid	29	10	7	12	44	45	37
Sporting Gijon	29	9	9	11	31	36	36
Almeria	29	9	9	11	31	38	36
Osasuna	29	9	7	13	26	32	34
Espanyol	29	8	9	12	21	36	33
Malaga	29	7	10	12	34	36	31
R Santander	29	7	10	12	30	42	31
Zaragoza	29	7	8	14	35	53	29
Tenerife	29	6	7	16	29	58	25
Valladolid	29	4	12	13	30	51	24
Xerez	29	5	7	17	24	50	22

LEADING GOALSCORERS

25 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
23 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)
18 David Villa (Valencia)
17 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)

SWEDEN

Mar 13: Kalmar 0 IFK 3.
Mar 14: Helsingborgs 1 Brommapojkarna 0; Hacken 2 Djurgardens 1; Halmstads 0 Trelleborgs 0; AIK 0 Mjallby 0.
Mar 15: Gefle 0 Elfsborg 0; Orebro 2 Atvidabergs 0; GAIS 0 Malmo 0.
Mar 20: Brommapojkarna 0 AIK 0.
Mar 21: Djurgardens 0 Helsingborgs 1; Trelleborgs 1 Kalmar 1; Mjallby 3 GAIS 0.
Mar 22: IFK 0 Hacken 1; Elfsborg 6 Halmstads 0; Atvidabergs 0 Gefle 1.
Mar 23: Malmo 3 Orebro 0.
Mar 27: Kalmar 2 Elfsborg 2.
Mar 28: Gefle 1 Malmo 3; Halmstads 4 Atvidabergs 0.
Mar 29: Helsingborgs 2 IFK 0; Orebro 0 Mjallby 2; GAIS 3 AIK 1.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Helsingborgs	3	3	0	0	4	0	9
Malmo	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Mjallby	3	2	1	0	5	0	7
Hacken	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Elfsborg	3	1	2	0	8	2	5
GAIS	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Gefle	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Halmstads	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
IFK	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Orebro	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Trelleborgs	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
AIK	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
Kalmar	3	0	2	1	3	6	2
Bromm'karna	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Djurgardens	2	0	0	2	1	3	0
Atvidabergs	3	0	0	3	0	7	0

SWITZERLAND

Mar 6: Basle 1 Grasshopper 2; Sion 2 Bellinzona 1.
Mar 7: Xamax 1 Young Boys 0; St Gallen 2 Aarau 2; Zurich 1 Lucerne 0.
Mar 10: Grasshopper 2 Aarau 0; Bellinzona 0 St Gallen 2.
Mar 13: Aarau 1 Zurich 3; Bellinzona 3 Xamax 2.
Mar 14: Grasshopper 2 St Gallen 1; Lucerne 0 Basle 1; Young Boys 1 Sion 0.
Mar 17: Grasshopper 2 Sion 0.
Mar 20: Sion 5 Lucerne 2; Young Boys 4 Grasshopper 0.
Mar 21: Xamax 2 Aarau 1; St Gallen 2 Basle 4; Zurich 2 Bellinzona 0.
Mar 24: Aarau 0 Sion 3; Basle 4 Zurich 1; Lucerne 2 St Gallen 3.
Mar 25: Bellinzona 1 Young Boys 3; Grasshopper 2 Xamax 1.
Mar 27: Sion 2 Basle 2; St Gallen 1 Zurich 0.
Mar 28: Grasshopper 2 Bellinzona 0; Xamax 1 Lucerne 2; Young Boys 3 Aarau 1.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Young Boys	27	20	2	5	60	30	62
Basle	27	17	5	5	64	36	56
Grasshopper	26	14	2	10	45	35	44
Lucerne	27	12	5	10	48	43	41
St Gallen	27	11	6	10	42	38	39
Sion	27	10	8	9	43	42	38
Xamax	27	9	7	11	43	40	34
Zurich	26	9	7	10	40	38	34
Bellinzona	27	5	3	19	34	74	18
Aarau	27	2	5	20	24	67	11

TURKEY

Mar 6: Sivasspor 0 Istanbul BB 1; Kasimpasa 2 Kayserispor 2; Diyarbakirspor 0 Bursaspor 3 (awarded); Trabzonspor 3 Genclerbirligi 1; Besiktas 3 Ankaraspor 0 (awarded).
Mar 7: Ankaragucu 0 Gaziantepspor 0; Manisaspor 0 Denizlispor 0; Fenerbahce 1 Antalyaspor 0.
Mar 8: Eskisehirspor 2 Galatasaray 1.
Mar 10: Kasimpasa 0 Bursaspor 2; Besiktas 2 Istanbul BB 0.
Mar 12: Gaziantepspor 1 Trabzonspor 1.
Mar 13: Genclerbirligi 0 Fenerbahce 0; Ankaraspor 0 Kasimpasa 3 (awarded).
Mar 14: Kayserispor 1 Eskisehirspor 2; Antalyaspor 3 Sivasspor 0; Istanbul BB 1 Diyarbakirspor 0; Bursaspor 2 Manisaspor 0; Galatasaray 3 Ankaragucu 0.
Mar 15: Denizlispor 0 Besiktas 1.
Mar 19: Kasimpasa 2 Besiktas 2.
Mar 20: Manisaspor 1 Istanbul BB 0; Diyarbakirspor 1 Antalyaspor 0; Fenerbahce 1 Gaziantepspor 0; Eskisehirspor 3 Ankaraspor 0 (awarded).
Mar 21: Ankaragucu 3 Kayserispor 0; Sivasspor 0 Genclerbirligi 2; Trabzonspor 1 Galatasaray 0.
Mar 22: Bursaspor 2 Denizlispor 1.
Mar 26: Istanbul BB 2 Bursaspor 1.
Mar 27: Genclerbirligi 1 Diyarbakirspor 0; Besiktas 3 Eskisehirspor 2; Ankaraspor 0 Ankaragucu 3 (awarded).
Mar 28: Denizlispor 3 Kasimpasa 3; Antalyaspor 0 Manisaspor 0; Gaziantepspor 2 Sivasspor 2; Galatasaray 0 Fenerbahce 1.
Mar 29: Kayserispor 1 Trabzonspor 0.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bursaspor	27	18	4	5	54	24	58
Fenerbahce	27	17	4	6	48	27	55
Besiktas	27	16	7	4	39	19	55
Galatasaray	27	16	5	6	51	28	53
Trabzonspor	27	13	7	7	45	28	46
Kayserispor	27	13	7	7	38	24	46
Eskisehirspor	27	12	9	6	37	27	45
Istanbul BB	27	12	7	8	33	35	43
Genclerbirligi	27	10	8	9	32	28	38
Antalyaspor	27	9	7	11	36	31	34
Gaziantepspor	27	8	10	9	31	30	34
Kasimpasa	27	8	9	10	46	47	33
Ankaragucu	27	7	11	9	32	31	32
Manisaspor	27	6	10	11	21	29	28
Sivasspor	27	7	4	16	29	49	25
Diyarbakirspor	27	5	9	13	22	38	24
Denizlispor	27	4	6	17	23	41	18
Ankaraspor*	27	0	0	27	0	81	0

**Ankaraspor expelled from league for having "anti-competitive" links with Ankaragucu; all fixtures being awarded as 3-0 wins to their opponents*

UKRAINE

Mar 6: Zorya 0 Karpaty 2; Illichivets 1 Dynamo 1; Metalist 2 Zakarpattya 1.
Mar 7: Arsenal 1 Dnipro 1; Metalurh Donetsk 0 Shakhtar 1; Kryvbas 0 Tavriya 1; Vorskla 1 Metalurh Zaporizhya 1; Obolon 1 Chornomorets 0.
Mar 13: Chornomorets 3 Kryvbas 1; Dynamo 1 Vorskla 0; Metalurh Zaporizhya 3 Metalurh Donetsk 2; Karpaty 3 Arsenal 3.
Mar 14: Zakarpattya 2 Zorya 1; Tavriya 3 Illichivets 3; Shakhtar 2 Metalist 1; Dnipro 2 Obolon 0.
Mar 19: Arsenal 0 Zakarpattya 0; Vorskla 0 Tavriya 1; Metalurh Donetsk 1 Dynamo 1.
Mar 20: Obolon 1 Karpaty 3; Illichivets 0 Kryvbas 3; Dnipro 3 Chornomorets 1; Zorya 0 Shakhtar 2; Metalist 4 Metalurh Zaporizhya 0.
Mar 24: Arsenal 2 Vorskla 0; Zakarpattya 1 Dynamo 0; Obolon 1 Illichivets 1; Dnipro 3 Kryvbas 1; Metalist 5 Chornomorets 1.
Mar 27: Zakarpattya 0 Obolon 1; Metalurh Zaporizhya 3 Zorya 1.
Mar 28: Chornomorets 1 Illichivets 1; Shakhtar 3 Arsenal 1; Dynamo 3 Metalist 0; Tavriya 1 Metalurh Donetsk 0; Kryvbas 1 Vorskla 1; Karpaty 1 Dnipro 0.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	22	17	4	1	49	16	55
Dynamo	22	16	5	1	45	12	53
Metalist	22	14	2	6	34	18	44
Dnipro	22	11	6	5	36	20	39
Karpaty	21	10	7	4	36	26	37
Tavriya	21	10	6	5	26	27	36
Metalurh D	21	9	4	8	29	23	31
Obolon	22	9	2	11	23	34	29
Arsenal	22	6	9	7	29	29	27
Metalurh Z	22	7	5	10	27	37	26
Illichivets	22	5	7	10	24	37	22
Vorskla	22	4	9	9	19	22	21
Chornomorets	22	5	4	13	17	34	19
Zakarpattya	22	5	2	15	15	33	17
Zorya	21	4	4	13	16	37	16
Kryvbas	22	3	2	17	21	41	11

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Beaten...Chacarita stop Boca's Juan Roman Riquelme (centre)

ARGENTINA

Little joy for Boca

The big Buenos Aires derby between Boca Juniors and River Plate was initially abandoned after just ten minutes, at La Bombanera, due to heavy rain.

Five days later, the game was played and Boca won 2-0 thanks to two goals from Chile's Gary Medel.

Boca followed that victory with a 4-1 defeat away to Chacarita Juniors that left them in the bottom three.

San Lorenzo defender Jonathan Botinelli was sent off for the 11th time in 194 games for the club in the 1-0 defeat to Rosario Central.

BRAZIL

Simply unstoppable

Santos have been scoring goals for fun. First they beat fourth-tier club Naviraiense 10-0 in the Copa do Brazil to secure an 11-0 aggregate victory, before notching up four more away to Remo in the next round.

They then finished off the month with a 9-1 home thrashing of Ituano, a 4-2 away victory at Botafogo and a 5-0 home crushing of Monte Azul, all in the state championship.

Meanwhile, Dentinho

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group 1

Mar 9
Racing (Uru) 2 (Mirabaje 19, Cauteruccio 69)
Cerro Porteno (Par) 1 (Caceres 84)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Belligoy (Arg)
Sent off: Villarroal (Cerro Porteno) 78min

Mar 10
Independiente Medellin (Col) 1 (Valoyes 76)
Corinthians (Bra) 1 (Dentinho 85)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)

Mar 17
Cerro Porteno 0
Corinthians 1 (Ronaldo 41)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
Sent off: Britez (Cerro Porteno) 82min

Mar 18
Independiente Medellin 0
Racing 0
Ref: Soto (Ven)
Sent off: Valoyes 66min, Ochoa 89min (both Independiente)

Mar 25
Racing 1 (Ostolaza 75)
Independiente Medellin 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Abal (Arg)
Sent off: Gimenez (Independiente) 85min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Racing	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Ind Medellin	4	0	3	1	2	3	3
Cerro Porteno	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Group 2

Mar 10
Once Caldas (Col) 1 (Valencia 58)
Monterrey (Mex) 1 (Morales 32)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Antequera (Bol)
Sent off: Zavala 57min, Galindo 83min (both Monterrey)

Mar 11
Nacional (Par) 0
Sao Paulo (Bra) 2 (Washington 59, 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

Mar 17
Monterrey 2 (Martinez pen 18, Cardozo 46)
Once Caldas 2 (Moreno 1, Castrillon 66)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Buckley (Per)

Mar 18
Sao Paulo 3 (Dagoberto 30, Leo Lima 32, Washington 54)
Nacional 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sao Paulo	4	3	0	1	8	2	9
Once Caldas	4	2	2	0	7	4	8
Monterrey	4	1	2	1	5	6	5
Nacional	4	0	0	4	1	9	0

Group 3

Mar 9
Bolivar (Bol) 0
Estudiantes (Arg) 0
Ref: Galeano (Par)

Mar 10
Alianza Lima (Per) 2 (Fernandez 41, Tragodara 58)
Juan Aurich (Per) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Rojas (Per)

Mar 16
Juan Aurich 4 (Guizasola 25, Tejada 44, Manco 59, Ascoy 86)
Alianza Lima 2 (Sanchez 3, Ovelar 72)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Simon (Bra)

Mar 23
Estudiantes 2 (Sosa 50, Boselli 78)
Bolivar 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Henrique (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alianza Lima	4	3	0	1	11	6	9
Estudiantes	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Juan Aurich	4	2	0	2	7	9	6
Bolivar	4	0	1	3	1	7	1

Group 4

Mar 23
Libertad (Par) 1 (Ayala 55)
Universitario (Per) 1 (Ramirez 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fagundes (Bra)

Mar 24
Lanus (Arg) 1 (Salcedo pen 17)
Blooming (Bol) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Polic (Chl)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	4	2	2	0	7	1	8
Universitario	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Lanus	4	2	0	2	5	5	6
Blooming	4	0	0	4	2	11	0

Group 5

Mar 11
Emelec (Ecu) 1 (Perez 70)
Cerro (Uru) 2 (Caballero 51, Dadomo 67)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

Mar 11
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) 1 (Minda 33)
Internacional (Bra) 1 (Giuliano 40)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)

Mar 18
Cerro 0
Internacional 0
Ref: Laverni (Arg)

Mar 25
Deportivo Quito 1 (Arroyo 64)
Emelec 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Espinel (Ecu)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Internacional	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Dep Quito	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Emelec	3	0	0	3	2	5	0

Group 6

Mar 9
Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu) 2 (Mendez 59, Escalada 82)
Morelia (Mex) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Perluzzo (Ven)
Sent off: Ramos (Cuenca) 86min; Moreno (Morelia) 86min

Mar 10
Nacional (Uru) 2 (Varela 5, Regueiro 40)
Banfield (Arg) 2 (Rodriguez 18, pen 36)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)

Mar 16
Banfield 0
Nacional 2 (Coates 34, Godoy 42)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Seneme (Bra)

Mar 16
Morelia 2 (Borgetti 19, 27)
Deportivo Cuenca 1 (Ladines 76)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Rivera (Per)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	4	2	2	0	7	4	8
Banfield	4	2	1	1	8	6	7
Morelia	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Dep Cuenca	4	1	0	3	6	9	3

Group 7

Mar 11
Deportivo Italia (Ven) 2 (Blanco 11, McIntosh 66)
Cruzeiro (Bra) 2 (Kleber 27, 50)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vera (Ecu)
Sent off: Kleber (Cruzeiro) 86min; Lobo (Italia) 88min

Mar 16
Colo Colo (Chl) 1 (Paredes 57)
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 1 (Silva 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)
Sent off: Zapata (Velez) 59min

Mar 24
Cruzeiro 2 (Fabinho 6, Pedro Ken 70)
Deportivo Italia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Arias (Par)

Mar 25
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Lopez 13, Silva 29)
Colo Colo 1 (Miralles 8)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)
Sent off: Millar (Colo Colo) 87min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
Cruzeiro	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Colo Colo	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
Dep Italia	4	0	1	3	2	6	1

Group 8

Mar 9
Universidad Catolica (Chl) 2 (Rubio 21, Silva 70)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 2 (Olivera 19, Puch 90)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Puga (Chl)

Mar 10
Caracas (Ven) 1 (Castellin 65)
Flamengo (Bra) 3 (Vagner Love pen 36, 75, Rodrigo Alvim 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Sent off: Toro (Flamengo) 53min

Mar 17
Caracas 0
Universidad Catolica 0
Ref: Morales (Mex)

Mar 17
Universidad de Chile 2 (E Vargas 42, Seymour 55)
Flamengo 1 (Rodrigo Alvim 51)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)

Mar 24
Universidad Catolica 1 (Morales 82)
Caracas 1 (Bustamante 50)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Flamengo	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Univ Catolica	4	0	3	1	3	5	3
Caracas	4	0	2	2	2	5	2

Group winners and the six runners-up with the best record qualify for 1st knockout round, to which Guadalajara (Mex) and San Luis (Mex) received byes

ARGENTINA

CLAUSURA

Tuesday, March 2
Racing Club 1 (Bieler 16)
Huracan 1 (Dominguez 90)

Rosario Central 2 (Caraglio 11, Figueroa 79)
Arsenal 3 (Yacuzzi 17, Obolo 21, Sena 61)

Velez Sarsfield 4 (Zapata 12, Silva 63, 82, Martinez 74)
Boca Juniors 4 (Monzon 37, Palermo 39, Gaitan 57, Medel 89)

Wednesday, March 3
Estudiantes 0
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Calderon 34)

Godoy Cruz 2 (Castillo 37, C Sanchez 74)
Lanus 1 (Salcedo 57)

Tigre 0
Independiente 1 (Silvera 58)

Thursday, March 4
Atletico Tucuman 1 (Pereyra 90)
Newell's Old Boys 1 (Sperdutti 63)

Banfield 3 (Ramirez 13, 90, Garcia 32)
Colon 1 (Fuertes 86)

Chacarita Juniors 0
Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Encina 86)

River Plate 1 (Affranchino 73)
San Lorenzo 0

Saturday, March 6
Boca Juniors 1 (Gaitan 13)
Racing Club 2 (Lluy 16, Hauche 44)

Lanus 0
Estudiantes 0

Sunday, March 7
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Torsiglieri og 85)
Velez Sarsfield 0

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Repetitive...Santos celebrate yet another goal against Ituano

scored Corinthians' 10,000th goal in all competitions when he was on target against Santo Andre in the Sao Paulo state championship. Roberto Carlos also scored his first goal for the club in the 2-1 win.

Also making the headlines were Gremio, who succeeded in making it 50 consecutive home games without a loss as they ran out 2-0 winners against Esportivo in the Porto Alegre state championship.

COLOMBIA

Tough times

Players from once mighty Millonarios boycotted training in the build-up to the Bogata derby against Independiente Santa Fe in protest over non-payment of wages.

The financially stricken club went on to lose the game 2-1 – a result which caused coach Luis Augusto Garcia to resign.

ECUADOR

Leaving it late

Paraguayan striker Juan Samudio scored late goals two weeks running as Barcelona followed up their 1-0 win away to Espoli with a 2-1 victory at home to Manta.

Barcelona remain one point ahead of LDU Quito, who beat El Nacional 1-0 with a goal from Uruguayan striker Juan Manuel Salgueiro.

Atletico Tucuman 0
Banfield 0

Huracan 2 (Dominguez 28, Esmerado 54)
Tigre 3 (Goltz og 14, Luna 44, Perez 67)

Independiente 2 (Gandin 39, Silvera 61)
River Plate 0

Newell's Old Boys 2 (Boghossian pen 39, 50)
Godoy Cruz 1 (Castillo 33)

Monday, March 8
Arsenal 3 (Obolo 32, 47, Alvarez 90)
Colon 0

Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Valentini og 24)
Rosario Central 1 (Nunez 60)

San Lorenzo 3 (Romeo 11, 66, S Gonzalez 69)
Chacarita Juniors 1 (Parra 43)

Friday, March 12
Godoy Cruz 2 (Higuain 34, 90)
Atletico Tucuman 1 (Paez 61)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Zarate 8)
Lanus 0

Saturday, March 13
Banfield 0
Arsenal 0

Chacarita Juniors 0
Independiente 1 (Tuzzio 5)

Colon 1 (Goux 43)
Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Perez 25)

Estudiantes 2 (Roselli og 45, Boselli 58)
Newell's Old Boys 0

Sunday, March 14
Racing Club 0
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Pavlovich 78)

River Plate 2 (Filipetto og 2, Canales 76)
Huracan 0

Rosario Central 1 (Caraglio 89)
San Lorenzo 0

Tigre 3 (Luna 11, 44, 78)
Boca Juniors 0

Wednesday, March 17
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Sosa 74)
Newell's Old Boys 1 (Achucarro 85)

Friday, March 19
Atletico Tucuman 1 (Azconzabal 45)
Estudiantes 3 (Boselli pen 3, 76, Sosa 47)

Huracan 2 (Clara 56, Goltz 88)
Chacarita Juniors 0

Saturday, March 20
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Pavlovich 15)
Tigre 1 (Luna 78)

Lanus 1 (Blanco 74)
Racing Club 0

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Schiavi pen 63)
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Lima 86)

San Lorenzo 2 (Gomez 12, 90)
Colon 2 (Bertoglio 5, Coudet 45)

Sunday, March 21
Gimnasia La Plata 0
Arsenal 2 (Leguizamon 33, Obolo 79)

Godoy Cruz 2 (Sigali 18, D Ramirez 74)
Banfield 0

Independiente 2 (Mareque 77, Nunez 86)
Rosario Central 0

Thursday, March 25
Boca Juniors 2 (Medel 25, 55)
River Plate 0

Friday, March 26
Estudiantes 2 (Boselli 14, F Fernandez 37)
Godoy Cruz 1 (Carranza 86)

Rosario Central 0
Huracan 2 (Peralta 79, Benegas 90)

Saturday, March 27
Banfield 3 (Ramirez 46, 66, Fernandez 74)
Gimnasia La Plata 2 (Stracqualursi 21, Perez 69)

Racing Club 1 (Martinez 77)
Newell's Old Boys 0

Tigre 0
Lanus 1 (Aguirre 81)

Sunday, March 28
Arsenal 1 (Aguirre 17)
San Lorenzo 0

Chacarita Juniors 4 (Parra 47, 81, Ramirez 57, Sciorilli 88)
Boca Juniors 1 (Gimenez 29)

Colon 1 (Fuertes 20)
Independiente 1 (Nunez 9)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Torsiglieri 16)
Atletico Tucuman 0

Monday, March 29
River Plate 0
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Sosa 21)

ARGENTINA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Independiente	11	7	3	1	14	7	24
Godoy Cruz	11	6	3	2	13	8	21
Estudiantes	11	6	2	3	18	10	20
Velez	11	5	4	2	18	11	19
Argentinos Jrs	11	5	4	2	16	13	19
Banfield	11	5	3	3	14	9	18
Arsenal	11	5	2	4	14	16	17
Tigre	11	4	3	4	13	11	15
Huracan	11	4	3	4	14	14	15
Colon	11	3	6	2	14	16	15
Newell's	11	3	5	3	13	13	14
Lanus	11	4	2	5	14	17	14
Chacarita Jrs	11	4	1	6	16	15	13
Gimnasia LP	11	3	4	4	12	13	13
Racing Club	11	4	1	6	11	12	13
River Plate	11	3	3	5	8	11	12
San Lorenzo	11	3	2	6	7	10	11
Boca Juniors	11	2	5	4	17	22	11
Rosario	11	1	5	5	6	14	8
At Tucuman	11	0	5	6	5	15	5

LEADING GOALSCORER
8 Mauro Boselli (Estudiantes)

BOLIVIA

BOLIVIA – APERTURA – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Jose	5	2	1	2	10	8	7
Guabira	5	2	1	2	5	7	7
The Strongest	5	1	3	1	9	9	6
Universitario	5	2	0	3	6	8	6
Aurora	5	1	1	3	5	7	4
Blooming	5	1	1	3	4	9	4

BOLIVIA – APERTURA – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bolivar	5	4	1	0	13	4	13
La Paz	5	3	1	1	11	8	10
Oriente	5	3	0	2	8	4	9
Wilstermann	5	2	1	2	7	6	7
Mamore	5	2	0	3	7	10	6
Potosi	5	2	0	3	3	8	6

Standings on March 30

CHILE

APERTURA

Mar 13: San Luis 3 Nublense 3.
Mar 14: Cobreloa 0 San Felipe 0; Wanderers 2 Palestino 0; Morning 1 Espanola 1; La Serena 1 Audax Italiano 3.
Mar 19: Colo Colo 6 La Serena 1.
Mar 20: O'Higgins 2 Wanderers 2; Palestino 0 Univ Chile 1; Everton 1 Morning 1.
Mar 21: Cobresal 4 San Luis 2; Audax Italiano 1 Univ Catolica 3.
Mar 26: Univ Chile 4 San Felipe 2.
Mar 27: Cobreloa 1 O'Higgins 1; Wanderers 2 Univ Catolica 4; Espanola 1 Nublense 3.
Mar 28: San Luis 0 Colo Colo 2; Cobresal 2 Palestino 1; La Serena 2 Everton 1; Morning 2 Univ Concepcion 0.

CHILE – APERTURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile	8	6	1	1	23	11	19
Colo Colo	8	5	1	2	21	10	16
Nublense	8	4	3	1	19	15	15
Cobresal	8	5	0	3	15	12	15
Espanola	8	4	3	1	10	8	15
O'Higgins	8	4	2	2	14	10	14
Univ Catolica	8	4	1	3	15	10	13
Morning	9	3	2	4	10	15	11
Everton	8	3	1	4	9	8	10
San Felipe	8	3	1	4	10	12	10
Audax Italiano	8	3	1	4	19	22	10
Wanderers	9	2	3	4	15	15	9
U Concepcion	7	2	3	2	7	8	9
Cobreloa	8	2	3	3	8	11	9
La Serena	9	3	0	6	14	28	9
Huachipato	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
San Luis	9	1	3	5	12	18	6
Palestino	9	1	2	6	5	11	5

COLOMBIA

APERTURA

Mar 3: Nacional 1 Once Caldas 2; La Equidad 1 Ind Santa Fe 2; Quindio 1 Junior 2; Dep Cali 1 Cucuta 1; Tolima 1 Huila 0; Pereira 1 America 0; Envigado 2 Cortulua 0; Cartagena 1 Ind Medellin 1.
Mar 6: Ind Santa Fe 3 Tolima 2; Ind Medellin 1 Junior 1; Once Caldas 0 Dep Cali 3.
Mar 7: Cucuta 1 Quindio 0; Chico 3 Nacional 2; America 3 La Equidad 1; Cortulua 1 Pereira 1; Cartagena 1 Envigado 1; Huila 1 Millonarios 1.
Mar 20: Huila 1 Tolima 3; Ind Santa Fe 2 Millonarios 1; Junior 0 Cartagena 3.
Mar 21: Quindio 1 Cortulua 2; Cucuta 2 Envigado 2; Once Caldas 5 Pereira 1; Chico 2 La Equidad 0; Dep Cali 1 America 1.
Mar 24: Tolima 1 Once Caldas 1; Millonarios 2 Chico 3.
Mar 27: Pereira 3 Cartagena 0; Dep Cali 3 Chico 0.
Mar 28: Envigado 1 Ind Medellin 7; La Equidad 3 Cortulua 0; Tolima 2 America 1; Millonarios 2 Ind Santa Fe 1; Quindio 0 Once Caldas 2; Junior 2 Cucuta 0.

COLOMBIA – APERTURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cartagena	10	6	3	1	18	12	21
Ind Medellin	9	5	3	1	16	7	18
Tolima	10	5	3	2	18	11	18
Junior	10	5	3	2	16	10	18
Once Caldas	10	5	2	3	22	16	17
Pereira	10	4	4	2	15	13	16
Ind Santa Fe	10	4	3	3	13	13	15
Dep Cali	10	4	2	4	16	13	14
Chico	10	4	2	4	13	15	14
Envigado	10	3	5	2	14	18	14
La Equidad	10	4	1	5	12	16	13
Cortulua	10	3	2	5	10	14	11
Millonarios	10	3	2	5	12	17	11
Huila	9	2	4	3	15	14	10
Nacional	8	3	1	4	11	10	10
Cucuta	10	2	4	4	6	11	10
America	10	2	3	5	10	13	9
Quindio	10	0	1	9	2	16	1

ECUADOR

1st stage

Mar 5: Olmedo 1 Cuenca 1.
Mar 6: Espoli 2 Manta 0; Independiente 1 Univ Catolica 1; Dep Quito 0 LDU 1.
Mar 7: El Nacional 1 Macara 1; Emelec 3 Barcelona 0.
Mar 13: Manta 2 El Nacional 2; Univ Catolica 0 Olmedo 0.
Mar 14: LDU 1 Espoli 1; Macara 1 Independiente 1.
Mar 15: Barcelona 1 Dep Quito 0.
Mar 19: Emelec 1 Univ Catolica 0; Manta 0 LDU 0.
Mar 21: Olmedo 0 Macara 0; Dep Quito 1 Cuenca 1; Espoli 0 Barcelona 1; El Nacional 1 Independiente 1.
Mar 27: Cuenca 3 Espoli 0; Barcelona 2 Manta 1; Independiente 1 Olmedo 1.
Mar 28: LDU 1 El Nacional 0; Univ Catolica 1 Dep Quito 1.
Mar 29: Macara 1 Emelec 2.

ECUADOR – 1ST STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	8	6	1	1	11	5	19
LDU	8	5	3	0	14	3	18
Cuenca	7	4	3	0	11	3	15
Emelec	7	4	2	1	13	10	14
Manta	8	2	3	3	10	10	9
Espoli	8	2	2	4	9	14	8
Independiente	8	1	5	2	6	11	8
El Nacional	8	1	4	3	11	13	7
Macara	8	1	4	3	9	12	7
Dep Quito	8	1	3	4	6	11	6
Univ Catolica	8	1	3	4	6	11	6
Olmedo	8	0	5	3	3	6	5

PARAGUAY

APERTURA

Mar 5: Sol de America 1 Cerro Porteno 2.
Mar 6: 3 de Febrero 0 Libertad 0; Luqueno 3 Tacuary 3; Nacional 1 Guarani 0.
Mar 7: Colombia 0 Olimpia 4; Trinidense 1 Rubio Nu 1.

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URUGUAY
Ten out of ten
A last-minute own goal by Defensor's Pablo Caglianone gave Penarol a dramatic 3-2 win and maintained their perfect record after 10 matches in the clausura.

VENEZUELA
Top coach quits
Noel Sanvicente, who led Caracas to five league titles and the quarter-finals of the Libertadores Cup last year, has quit as coach of the country's most successful side.

USA
Donovan back in LA
Back after a successful loan spell in England with Everton, Landon Donovan set up Edson Buddle for the only goal as Los Angeles Galaxy beat New England Revolution in the first game of the season. New York Red Bulls marked the opening of their new stadium with a 1-0 win over Chicago Fire, while Seattle beat MLS newcomers Philadelphia 2-0.

Assist...Donovan (left)

BOTSWANA
Cup shock then sack
Manfred Chabinga was sacked as coach of Gaborone United, despite their victory over South African giants Orlando Pirates in the first round of the African Champions League.

TANZANIA
Back on top
Simba reclaimed the Tanzanian Premier League they last won two years ago with two games to spare when they beat Azam 2-0, with both goals coming from Kenya international Mike Barasa.

Mar 10: Libertad 0 Luqueno 1.
Mar 12: Tacuary 1 Sol de America 1; Olimpia 1 3 de Febrero 0.
Mar 13: Rubio Nu 0 Luqueno 0; Guarani 2 Trinidense 0; Cerro Porteno 4 Colombia 1.
Mar 14: Libertad 0 Nacional 0.
Mar 16: Sol de America 2 Olimpia 1.
Mar 17: Colombia 1 Guarani 3; 3 de Febrero 2 Rubio Nu 3; Trinidense 2 Luqueno 2.
Mar 20: Libertad 0 Olimpia 0.
Mar 21: Trinidense 2 Sol de America 0; Luqueno 1 Nacional 1; Tacuary 3 3 de Febrero 0; Rubio Nu 2 Colombia 1; Guarani 1 Cerro Porteno 2.
Mar 24: Nacional 4 Tacuary 0.
Mar 26: Sol de America 1 Libertad 4.
Mar 27: Olimpia 0 Guarani 0; Cerro Porteno 1 Rubio Nu 1; 3 de Febrero 0 Luqueno 0.
Mar 28: Colombia 0 Tacuary 0; Nacional 2 Trinidense 0.

PARAGUAY – APERTURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	10	8	1	1	20	9	25
Rubio Nu	11	6	4	1	20	9	22
Guarani	11	6	3	2	19	10	21
Olimpia	11	5	4	2	16	9	19
Nacional	11	5	3	3	18	12	18
Libertad	10	4	4	2	14	5	16
Luqueno	11	2	6	3	12	13	12
Colombia	11	3	2	6	12	23	11
Tacuary	11	2	3	6	14	23	9
3 de Febrero	11	2	3	6	8	17	9
Trinidense	11	1	4	6	8	16	7
Sol America	11	2	1	8	12	27	7

PERU

Regular season
Mar 2: Universitario 1 Sporting Cristal 2.
Mar 6: Inti Gas 1 San Martin 4; Juan Aurich 3 Alianza Atletico 1; CNI 2 Cesar Vallejo 4; Jose Galvez 1 Melgar 1; Alianza Lima 4 Sport Boys 1.
Mar 7: Cienciano 2 Huancayo 1; S Cristal 1 Leon 0.
Mar 13: Sport Boys 1 Inti Gas 1; Cesar Vallejo 5 Cienciano 0; Universitario 1 Jose Galvez 0.
Mar 14: Melgar 1 CNI 1; Leon 0 Total Chalaco 1; Alianza Atletico 0 Sporting Cristal 0.
Mar 19: CNI 0 Universitario 2.
Mar 20: Alianza Lima 0 Cesar Vallejo 2; Inti Gas 2 Huancayo 1; Juan Aurich 3 Sport Boys 0.
Mar 21: Sporting Cristal 0 San Martin 4; Total Chalaco 0 Alianza Atletico 0; Cienciano 1 Melgar 1.
Mar 24: San Martin 1 Juan Aurich 0.
Mar 27: Cesar Vallejo 1 Inti Gas 0.
Mar 28: Universitario 2 Cienciano 0; Melgar 4 Alianza Lima 2; Sport Boys 1 Sporting Cristal 2; San Martin 3 Total Chalaco 1; Leon 2 CNI 1; Alianza Atletico 0 Jose Galvez 0.

PERU – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cesar Vallejo	7	6	0	1	18	5	18
San Martin	7	6	0	1	18	5	18
S Cristal	7	5	1	1	11	9	16
Leon	6	4	0	2	6	4	12
Juan Aurich	6	3	1	2	9	5	10
Alianza Lima	6	3	0	3	10	8	9
Universitario	6	3	0	3	8	6	9
Melgar	7	1	5	1	10	10	8
Inti Gas	7	2	2	3	8	11	8
Al Atletico	7	1	4	2	4	8	7
Sport Boys	7	2	1	4	8	15	7
Total Chalaco	6	1	3	2	5	7	6
Jose Galvez	6	1	2	3	3	7	5
Huancayo	5	1	1	3	8	7	4
CNI	7	1	1	5	8	17	4
Cienciano	7	1	1	5	6	16	4

URUGUAY

CLAUSURA
Mar 5: Fenix 2 Cerro 0.
Mar 6: Danubio 2 Racing 3; Central Espanol 4 Tacuarembo 1; Rampla 1 Liverpool 3; Nacional 2 Wanderers 1.
Mar 7: Cerrito 2 Defensor 0; Atenas 0 River Plate 2; Penarol 5 Cerro Largo 0.
Mar 13: Wanderers 1 Racing 2; Cerro Largo 1 Defensor 3; Atenas 0 Nacional 6.
Mar 14: Danubio 1 Cerrito 0; Tacuarembo 0 Liverpool 1; Fenix 1 Rampla 0; Central Espanol 0 Penarol 2.
Mar 20: Rampla 1 Penarol 2; Defensor 2 Tacuarembo 3; Cerrito 1 Fenix 2.
Mar 21: Cerro 1 Wanderers 2; Central Espanol 0 Nacional 2; Atenas 0 Danubio 2; Liverpool 1 River Plate 1.
Mar 24: River Plate 0 Cerro 1.
Mar 27: Liverpool 0 Central Espanol 2; Cerro 3 Nacional 1; Cerro Largo 1 Rampla 1.
Mar 28: Defensor 2 Penarol 3; Wanderers 1 Danubio 3; River Plate 3 Cerrito 0; Tacuarembo 1 Fenix 1.

URUGUAY – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol	10	10	0	0	30	10	30
Fenix	10	7	2	1	14	4	23
Nacional	10	6	1	3	21	11	19
Cerro	10	6	1	3	18	13	19
Danubio	10	5	1	4	17	15	16
Liverpool	10	4	3	3	14	13	15
River Plate	10	4	2	4	19	12	14
Racing	8	4	0	4	8	15	12
C Espanol	10	3	2	5	16	17	11
Rampla	10	3	2	5	12	15	11
Tacuarembo	10	3	2	5	13	19	11
Cerrito	10	3	1	6	11	17	10
Defensor	10	3	0	7	14	21	9
Atenas	9	3	0	6	10	18	9
Cerro Largo	9	2	2	5	7	18	8
Wanderers	10	2	1	7	13	19	7

VENEZUELA

VENEZUELA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zamora	10	5	4	1	15	9	19
Caracas	8	5	3	0	17	6	18
Tachira	8	5	2	1	14	8	17
Esppor	10	5	2	3	20	15	17
Italia	8	5	1	2	16	8	16
Lara	10	4	4	2	16	12	16
El Vigia	10	5	1	4	16	18	16
Estudiantes	10	3	5	2	12	13	14
Anzoategui	10	4	2	4	10	13	14
Mineros	10	3	4	3	12	11	13
Monagas	9	3	2	4	12	14	11
Trujillanos	10	3	2	5	12	14	11
Zulia	10	3	2	5	9	13	11
Aragua	10	3	1	6	10	16	10
Llaneros	10	2	3	5	12	16	9
Yaracuyanos	9	2	2	5	14	18	8
Centro Italo	10	2	2	6	11	16	8
Carabobo	10	1	4	5	9	17	7

Standings on March 30

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals
1st legs - March 9-11; 2nd legs - March 16-18
Arabe Unido (Pan) v Cruz Azul (Mex)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Columbus Crew (USA) v Toluca (Mex)
2-2, 2-3 (agg 4-5)
Comunicaciones (Gtm) v Pachuca (Mex)
1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)
Marathon (Hnd) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
2-0, 1-6 (agg 3-6)

MEXICO

CLAUSURA
Mar 6: Monterrey 3 Pachuca 0; Jaguares 4 Guadalajara 0; Morelia 2 Tecos 0; San Luis 1 Cruz Azul 2; Atlas 1 Toluca 1.
Mar 7: Pumas 4 Puebla 1; Indios 0 Tigres 1; Santos 4 Atlante 2; America 6 Queretaro 0.
Mar 12: Tecos 4 Indios 1.
Mar 13: Queretaro 1 Morelia 1; Jaguares 1 San Luis 1; Tigres 0 Atlas 1; Guadalajara 0 Pumas 0; Pachuca 0 Santos 3; Atlante 2 America 2.
Mar 14: Toluca 2 Cruz Azul 3; Puebla 1 Monterrey 1.
Mar 20: Monterrey 2 Guadalajara 1; Cruz Azul 4 Tigres 0; Morelia 0 Atlante 1; San Luis 2 Toluca 3; Atlas 0 Tecos 1.
Mar 21: Pumas 2 Jaguares 0; Indios 1 Queretaro 0; Santos 2 Puebla 1; America 2 Pachuca 2.
Mar 26: Tecos 2 Cruz Azul 1.
Mar 27: Queretaro 2 Atlas 1; Jaguares 1 Monterrey 1; Tigres 0 Toluca 1; Atlante 3 Indios 0; Guadalajara 6 Santos 2; Pachuca 1 Morelia 0.
Mar 28: Pumas 0 San Luis 0; Puebla 2 America 1.

MEXICO – CLAUSURA – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadalajara	12	9	1	2	26	14	28
Queretaro	12	5	3	4	11	18	18
Toluca	12	4	5	3	16	13	17
Atlas	12	5	1	6	18	17	16
San Luis	12	2	3	7	12	22	9
Indios	12	1	3	8	4	25	6

MEXICO – CLAUSURA – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monterrey	12	8	3	1	24	11	27
Morelia	12	6	2	4	16	7	20
America	12	5	3	4	24	16	18
Pachuca	12	5	2	5	20	19	17
Puebla	12	3	3	6	19	25	12
Jaguares	12	1	6	5	14	19	9

MEXICO – CLAUSURA – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	12	7	3	2	24	18	24
Pumas	12	5	6	1	17	7	21
Cruz Azul	12	6	2	4	15	12	20
Tecos	12	4	2	6	22	23	14
Atlante	12	3	3	6	14	19	12
Tigres	12	2	3	7	11	22	9

UNITED STATES

Mar 25: Seattle 2 Philadelphia 0.
Mar 26: Chivas 0 Colorado 1.
Mar 27: Columbus 2 Toronto 0; Dallas 1 Houston 1; New York 1 Chicago 0; Kansas City 4 DC United 0; San Jose 0 Salt Lake 3; Los Angeles 1 New England 0.

UNITED STATES – EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kansas City	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Columbus	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
New York	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Chicago	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
New England	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Philadelphia	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Toronto	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
DC United	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

UNITED STATES – WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salt Lake	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Seattle	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Colorado	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Los Angeles	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Dallas	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Houston	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Chivas	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
San Jose	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

AFRICA

AFRICAN SUPER CUP
(Champions League holders, TP Mazembe v Confederation Cup holders, Stade Malien)

Feb 21 - Lubumbashi, DR Congo
TP Mazembe (DRC) 2 (Sunzu 15, Singuluma 80)
Stade Malien (Mli) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Seechurn (Mts)

EGYPT

EGYPT

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ahly	23	15	7	1	37	18	52
Zamalek	24	14	4	6	31	18	46
Petrojet	23	11	5	7	36	29	38
Entag Harby	24	10	7	7	33	24	37
Ismaili	23	9	10	4	27	21	37
Shorta	23	9	7	7	29	23	34
Jaish	23	8	8	7	37	32	32
Haras Hedood	23	8	8	7	28	27	32
Ittihad	24	9	5	10	22	27	32
Masry	24	6	11	7	24	29	29
ENPPI	23	7	8	8	22	29	29
Gouna	24	7	6	11	22	29	27
Mehalla	24	7	6	11	16	25	27
Mokawloon	24	5	10	9	26	27	25
Assyut	24	3	7	14	18	38	16
Mansoura	23	3	5	15	19	31	14

Standings on March 30

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SuperSport	30	16	9	5	51	25	57
Sundowns	30	16	8	6	43	24	56
Chiefs	30	14	9	7	39	25	51
Santos	30	12	11	7	34	20	47
Pirates	30	10	14	6	26	18	44
Celtic	30	9	15	6	38	35	42
Ajax	30	11	9	10	27	29	42
Swallows	30	11	9	10	30	36	42
AmaZulu	30	11	6	13	30	35	39
Wits	30	7	14	9	32	38	35
Maritzburg	30	8	11	11	28	39	35
Arrows	30	6	14	10	25	33	32
FS Stars	30	5	16	9	29	30	31
Platinum Stars	30	9	4	17	26	34	31
Aces*	30	5	11	14	20	38	26
Cosmos (R)	30	4	12	14	21	40	24

**Aces into relegation/promotion play-offs*

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CHINA

Champions in form

Beijing Guoan began the defence of their Super League title with a 2-0 win over Nanchang Bayi. Australian forward Joel Griffiths scored the opener, with Wang Xiaolong adding the second.

The only team from last year's top four to drop points were Changchun Yatai, who were held to a goalless draw at home by newly promoted Liaoniong Hunyong.

Changchun Yatai did, however, make the most of home advantage in the Asian Champions League, thrashing Persipura of Indonesia 9-0. The game was played in temperatures of minus six degrees Celsius in northern China. Temperatures on the visitors' home island of New Guinea range between 22 and 32 degrees Celsius.

QATAR

Three in a row

Al Gharafa were crowned league champions for the third successive season following their 4-1 victory over closest contenders Al Sadd.

SOUTH KOREA

Perfect start

Seongnam Ilhwa maintained their perfect start to the Asian Champions League with a 3-1 win at home to previously unbeaten Beijing Guoan.

The Chinese took the lead through former Scotland international Maurice Ross, before the Koreans hit back through Song Ho-young, Dzenan Radoncic and Jo Jae-chol. The only other teams with a 100 per cent record in the group stage are Kashima Antlers of Japan and Australia's Adelaide United.

On target...Radoncic

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 9: Al Gharafa (Qat) 3 Al Ahli (Sau) 2; Esteghlal Tehran (Irn) 0 Al Jazira (UAE) 0.
Mar 23: Al Ahli 5 Al Jazira 1; Esteghlal Tehran 3 Al Gharafa 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esteghlal	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Al Gharafa	3	2	0	1	5	6	6
Al Ahli	3	1	0	2	8	6	3
Al Jazira	3	0	1	2	2	7	1

Group B

Mar 9: Al Ittihad (Sau) 2 Zob-Ahan (Irn) 2; Al Wahda (UAE) 1 Bunyodkor (Uzb) 2.
Mar 24: Al Wahda 0 Al Ittihad 2; Zob-Ahan 3 Bunyodkor 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zob-Ahan	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Bunyodkor	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Al Ittihad	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Al Wahda	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

Group C

Mar 10: Pakhtakor (Uzb) 1 Al Shabab (Sau) 3; Sepahan (Irn) 0 Al Ain (UAE) 0.
Mar 23: Al Ain 2 Al Shabab 1; Pakhtakor 2 Sepahan 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pakhtakor	3	2	0	1	4	4	6
Al Shabab	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Al Ain	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Sepahan	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

Group D

Mar 10: Al Ahli (UAE) 0 Al Sadd (Qat) 5; Al Hilal (Sau) 3 Mes (Irn) 1.
Mar 24: Al Hilal 1 Al Ahli 1; Al Sadd 4 Mes 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Al Sadd	3	2	0	1	9	4	6
Mes	3	1	0	2	6	9	3
Al Ahli	3	0	1	2	3	10	1

Group E

Mar 9: Kawasaki Frontale (Jap) 1 Beijing Guoan (Chn) 3; Melbourne Victory (Aus) 0 Songnam Ilhwa (SKo) 2.
Mar 23: Kawasaki Frontale 4 Melbourne Victory 0; Songnam Ilhwa 3 Beijing Guoan 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Songnam	3	3	0	0	7	1	9
Beijing	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Kawasaki	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Melbourne	3	0	0	3	0	7	0

Group F

Mar 9: Changchun Yatai (Chn) 9 Persipura Jayapura (Ins) 0; Chonbuk Motors (SKo) 1 Kashima Antlers (Jap) 2.
Mar 24: Changchun Yatai 1 Chonbuk Motors 2; Kashima Antlers 5 Persipura Jayapura 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
Chonbuk	3	2	0	1	7	4	6
Changchun	3	1	0	2	10	3	3
Persipura	3	0	0	3	1	18	0

Group G

Mar 10: Gamba Osaka (Jap) 1 Henan Jianye (Chn) 1; Singapore Armed Forces (Sin) 0 Suwon Bluewings (SKo) 2.
Mar 23: Henan Jianye 0 Suwon Bluewings 2; Singapore Armed Forces 2 Gamba Osaka 4.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Suwon	3	2	1	0	4	0	7
Gamba	3	1	2	0	5	3	5
Henan	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
S Armed Forces	3	0	1	2	2	6	1

Group H

Mar 10: Pohang Steelers (SKo) 2 Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jap) 1; Shandong Luneng (Chn) 0 Adelaide United (Aus) 2.
Mar 24: Adelaide United 3 Sanfrecce Hiroshima 2; Pohang Steelers 1 Shandong Luneng 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Adelaide	3	3	0	0	6	2	9
Pohang	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Shandong	3	1	0	2	1	3	3
Sanfrecce	3	0	0	3	3	6	0

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Championship play-offs

Major semi-final

1st leg - February 18; 2nd leg - March 7
Melbourne v Sydney 2-1, 2-2 (agg 4-3)
Melbourne qualified for Grand Final; Sydney qualified for preliminary final

Minor semi-final

Mar 7: Wellington 3 Newcastle 1 (aet).
Wellington qualified for preliminary final; Newcastle eliminated

Preliminary final

Mar 13: Sydney 4 Wellington 2.
Sydney qualify for Grand Final; Wellington eliminated

Grand Final

Mar 20 - Etihad stadium, Melbourne
Melbourne 1 (Leijer 82)
Sydney 1 (Bridge 63)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 44,560.
Ref: Delovski
Sydney 4-2 on pens

JAPAN

Mar 6: Shonan 1 Montedio 1; Jubilo 0 Vegalta 1; Tokyo 1 Yokohama 0; Sanfrecce 1 Shimizu 1; Kashima 2 Urawa 0; Kawasaki 2 Albirex 1; Gamba 1 Nagoya 2.
Mar 7: Vissel 2 Kyoto 0; Omiya 3 Cerezo 0.
Mar 13: Yokohama 3 Shonan 0; Albirex 1 Jubilo 1; Shimizu 3 Montedio 0; Vegalta 3 Omiya 1; Nagoya 2 Kawasaki 3.
Mar 14: Kyoto 1 Kashima 1; Urawa 1 Tokyo 0; Cerezo 1 Gamba 1; Vissel 1 Sanfrecce 2.
Mar 20: Shonan 1 Sanfrecce 3; Shimizu 1 Vissel 0; Kyoto 2 Vegalta 1; Yokohama 4 Kawasaki 0; Omiya 0 Kashima 1; Gamba 0 Albirex 0; Tokyo 0 Cerezo 0.
Mar 21: Montedio 1 Urawa 1; Nagoya 2 Jubilo 0.
Mar 27: Kawasaki 0 Shimizu 0; Shonan 2 Albirex 0; Kashima 3 Montedio 1; Vissel 1 Yokohama 1; Jubilo 2 Kyoto 3; Cerezo 2 Urawa 3.
Mar 28: Omiya 0 Tokyo 2; Gamba 2 Vegalta 2.

JAPAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Shimizu	4	2	2	0	5	1	8
Yokohama	4	2	1	1	8	2	7
Sanfrecce	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Vegalta	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Tokyo	4	2	1	1	3	1	7
Kyoto	4	2	1	1	6	6	7
Urawa	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
Kawasaki	4	2	1	1	5	7	7
Nagoya	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Vissel	4	1	1	2	4	4	4
Shonan	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
Gamba	4	0	3	1	4	5	3
Omiya	4	1	0	3	4	6	3
Albirex	4	0	2	2	2	5	2
Cerezo	4	0	2	2	3	7	2
Montedio	4	0	2	2	3	8	2
Jubilo	4	0	1	3	3	7	1

SOUTH KOREA

Mar 6: Jeju 2 Chonbuk 2; Suwon 4 Busan 3; Pohang 2 Daegu 1.
Mar 7: Daejeon 0 Gyeongnam 3; Incheon 2 Gwangju 0; Gangwon 0 Seoul 3; Chunnam 3 Ulsan 3.
Mar 13: Gangwon 2 Daejeon 2; Ulsan 0 Busan 2.
Mar 14: Daegu 0 Chunnam 3; Gyeongnam 1 Jeju 1; Gwangju 1 Pohang 1; Seoul 0 Chonbuk 1; Songnam 6 Incheon 0.
Mar 19: Suwon 2 Incheon 1; Chonbuk 1 Songnam 1.
Mar 20: Pohang 4 Gangwon 0.
Mar 21: Chunnam 1 Gyeongnam 1; Daegu 1 Ulsan 2; Jeju 2 Daejeon 0; Busan 2 Gwangju 0.
Mar 27: Songnam 1 Busan 1; Incheon 1 Ulsan 2; Seoul 1 Pohang 0.
Mar 28: Gyeongnam 2 Suwon 1; Gwangju 0 Jeju 0; Daejeon 1 Daegu 2; Gangwon 5 Chunnam 2.

SOUTH KOREA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ulsan	5	3	1	1	8	7	10
Seoul	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Jeju	5	2	3	0	6	3	9
Songnam	4	2	2	0	11	2	8
Chonbuk	4	2	2	0	7	4	8
Gyeongnam	5	2	2	1	7	4	8
Pohang	4	2	1	1	7	3	7
Busan	5	2	1	2	8	6	7
Suwon	4	2	0	2	8	9	6
Incheon	5	2	0	3	5	10	6
Chunnam	5	1	2	2	9	10	5
Gwangju	5	1	2	2	3	6	5
Gangwon	5	1	1	3	7	14	4
Daegu	5	1	0	4	5	10	3
Daejeon	5	0	1	4	5	14	1

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 6: Magenta (NC) 1 Auckland City (NZ) 1.
Mar 19: Manu Ura (Tah) 1 Waitakere United (NZ) 5.
Mar 27: Magenta 8 Manu Ura 1.
Mar 28: Auckland City 2 Waitakere United 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waitakere	6	3	3	0	15	6	12
Auckland	6	3	3	0	13	5	12
Magenta	6	1	3	2	13	10	6
Manu Ura	6	0	1	5	3	23	1

Group B

Mar 6: Tafea (Van) 0 Marist (Sol) 0.
Mar 7: Lautoka (Fij) 0 Hekari United (PNG) 1.
Mar 27: Marist 1 Hekari United 4; Tafea 1 Lautoka 3.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hekari	6	4	1	1	15	7	13
Lautoka	6	4	0	2	12	6	12
Tafea	6	2	2	2	8	11	8
Marist	6	0	1	5	3	14	1

Group winners qualified for the Final (1st leg - April 17; 2nd leg - May 2)

R (in tables) = relegated

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

May 2
OFC Champions League Final, second leg
May 5
Italian Cup Final
May 6
Libertadores Cup round of 16, first leg
May 7/8/9
CAF Champions League second round, second leg
May 11/12
AFC Champions League round of 16
May 12
Europa League Final
May 13
Libertadores Cup round of 16, second leg
May 15
FA Cup Final: Aston Villa or Chelsea v Portsmouth or Tottenham Hotspur;
German Cup Final: Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen
May 20
Libertadores Cup quarter-finals, first leg
May 22
UEFA Champions League Final
May 26
Spanish Cup Final: Atletico Madrid v Sevilla
May 27
Libertadores Cup quarter-finals, second leg

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USA MLS

CHICAGO FIRE

GOALKEEPERS		
40	Andrew DYKSTRA	02.01.86
25	Sean JOHNSON	31.05.89
DEFENDERS		
2	CJ BROWN	15.06.75
22	Wilman CONDE (Col)	29.08.82
28	Steven KINNEY	28.10.87
23	Krzysztof KROL (Pol)	06.03.87
32	Dasan ROBINSON	06.0684
5	Tim WARD	28.02.87
4	Kwame WATSON-SIRIBOE	13.11.86
MIDFIELDERS		
18	Mike BANNER	20.10.84
19	Corben BONE	16.09.88
9	Baggio HUSIDIC (Bos)	19.05.87
21	Justin MAPP	18.10.84
6	Julio MARTINEZ (ElS)	08.07.85
16	Marco PAPPA (Gtm)	15.11.87
12	Logan PAUSE	22.02.81
11	John THORRINGTON	17.10.79
FORWARDS		
3	Calen CARR	04.10.82
7	Stefan DIMITROV (Bul)	08.10.84
15	Collins JOHN (Hol)	10.07.85
8	Peter LOWRY	02.10.85
20	Brian McBRIDE	19.06.72
14	Patrick NYARKO (Gha)	15.01.86
COACH		
	Carlos DE LOS COBOS (Mex)	10.12.58

CHIVAS USA

GOALKEEPERS		
1	Dan KENNEDY	22.07.82
22	Zach THORNTON	10.10.73
DEFENDERS		
30	Carlos BORJA	18.01.88
13	Jonathan BORNSTEIN	07.11.84
45	Yamith CUESTA (Col)	17.04.89
6	Ante JAZIC (Can)	27.02.76
4	Michael UMANA (CR)	16.07.82
MIDFIELDERS		
19	Jorge FLORES	16.09.89
18	Blair GAVIN	08.01.89
16	Sacha KLJESTAN	09.09.85
11	Michael LAHOUD	15.09.86
14	Gerson MAYEN	09.02.89
7	Osael ROMERO (ElS)	18.04.86
5	Marcelo SARAGOSA (Bra)	22.01.82
8	Mariano TRUJILLO (Mex)	19.05.77
28	Cesar ZAMORA	27.05.91
21	Ben ZEMANSKI	12.05.88
FORWARDS		
17	Justin BRAUN	31.03.87
77	Chukwudi CHIJINDU	20.02.86
9	Maykel GALINDO (Cub)	28.01.81
10	Jesus PADILLA (Mex)	03.03.87
29	MAICON SANTOS (Bra)	18.04.84
COACH		
	Martin VASQUEZ (Mex)	24.12.63

COLORADO RAPIDS

GOALKEEPERS		
17	Ian JOYCE	12.07.85
18	Matt PICKENS	05.04.82
DEFENDERS		
21	Julien BAUDET (Fra)	13.01.79
2	Danny EARLS (Ire)	22.04.89
26	Michael HOLODY	30.03.87
4	Jeff LARENTOWICZ	05.08.83
25	Pablo MASTROENI	29.08.76
3	Drew MOOR	15.01.84
19	Oscar MURILLO (Col)	18.04.88
29	Scott PALGUTA	23.08.82
7	Rob VALENTINO	21.12.85
22	Marvell WYNNE	08.05.86
MIDFIELDERS		
8	Mehdi BALLOUCHY (Mor)	06.04.83
27	Kosuke KIMURA (Jap)	14.05.84
16	Ross LaBAUEX	05.12.88
23	Ciaran O'BRIEN	17.11.87
20	Jamie SMITH (Sco)	20.11.80
15	Wells THOMPSON	25.11.83
FORWARDS		
24	Andre AKPAN	09.12.87
9	Conor CASEY	25.07.81
11	Colin CLARK	11.04.84
14	Omar CUMMINGS (Jam)	13.07.82
13	Ross SCHUNK	28.04.86
COACH		
	Gary SMITH (Eng)	12.03.68

COLUMBUS CREW

GOALKEEPERS		
30	Andy GRUENEBAUM	30.12.82
1	William HESMER	23.11.81
25	Kenny SCHOENI	04.01.84
DEFENDERS		
23	Eric BRUNNER	12.02.86
29	Shaun FRANCIS (Jam)	02.10.86
6	Andy IRO (Eng)	26.11.84
14	Chad MARSHALL	22.01.84
8	Duncan OUGHTON (NZ)	14.06.77
4	Gino PADULA (Arg)	11.07.76
24	Jed ZAYNER	13.12.84
MIDFIELDERS		
15	Kevin BURNS	22.03.85
16	Brian CARROLL	20.07.81
11	Dilly DUKA	15.09.89
17	Emmanuel EKPO (Nig)	20.12.87
12	Eddie GAVEN	25.10.86
2	Frankie HEJDUK	05.08.74
22	Adam MOFFAT (Sco)	15.05.86
5	Danny O'ROURKE	31.05.83
7	Guillermo Barros SCHELOTTO (Arg)	04.05.73
18	Robbie ROGERS	12.05.87
28	Othaniel YANEZ	09.11.87
FORWARDS		
9	Jason GAREY	19.07.84
19	Sergio HERRERA (Col)	15.03.81
32	Steven LENHART	28.08.86
20	Emilio RENTERIA (Ven)	02.10.84
COACH		
	Robert WARZYCHA (Pol)	20.08.63

DALLAS

GOALKEEPERS		
1	Kevin HARTMAN	25.05.74
44	Dario SALA (Arg)	17.10.74
DEFENDERS		
5	Jair BENITEZ (Col)	11.01.79
15	Kyle DAVIES	11.04.89
27	Edson EDWARD (Can)	20.09.88
3	Ugo IHEMELU	03.04.83
26	Anthony WALLACE	26.01.89
MIDFIELDERS		
24	Eric ALEXANDER	14.04.88
12	Eric AVILA	24.11.87
17	Marvin CHAVEZ (Hnd)	03.11.83
10	David FERREIRA (Col)	09.08.79
8	Bruno GUARDA (Bra)	06.02.86
2	Daniel HERNANDEZ	23.07.76
14	George JOHN	20.03.87
19	Zach LOYD	18.07.87
21	Bryan LEYVA (Mex)	09.02.92
13	Dax MCCARTY	30.04.87
4	Heath PEARCE	13.08.84
20	Brek SHEA	28.02.90
FORWARDS		
9	Jeff CUNNINGHAM	21.08.76
16	Atiba HARRIS (StK)	09.01.85
18	Peri MAROSEVIC	05.05.89
7	Dave VAN DEN BERGH (Hol)	07.05.76
23	Andrew WIEDEMAN	22.08.89
31	Jason YEISLEY	30.09.86
COACH		
	Schellas HYNDMAN (Mco)	04.11.49

DC UNITED

GOALKEEPERS		
28	Bill HAMID	25.11.90
23	Troy PERKINS	29.07.81
31	Josh WICKS (Ger)	01.11.83
DEFENDERS		
20	Lyle ADAMS (Jam)	19.12.86
4	Marc BURCH	07.05.84
5	Dejan JAKOVIC (Can)	16.07.85
2	Julius JAMES (T&T)	09.07.84
18	Devon McTAVISH	08.08.84
26	Bryan NAMOFF	28.05.79
3	Juan Manuel PENA (Bol)	17.01.73
22	Rodney WALLACE (CR)	17.06.88
MIDFIELDERS		
24	Brandon BARKLAGE	02.11.86
12	Cristian CASTILLO (ElS)	25.08.84
16	Kurt MORSINK (CR)	27.06.84
14	Andy NAJAR (Hon)	16.03.93
25	Santino QUARANTA	14.10.84
21	Ty SHIPALANE (SAf)	05.10.85
19	Clyde SIMMS	21.08.82
FORWARDS		
9	Danny ALLSOPP (Aus)	10.08.78
7	Adam CRISTMAN	08.01.85
17	Thabiso KHUMALO (SAf)	27.10.80
99	Jaime MORENO (Bol)	19.01.74
13	Chris PONTIUS	12.05.87
COACH		
	Curt ONALFO	19.11.69

HOUSTON DYNAMO

GOALKEEPERS		
30	Tyler DERIC	30.08.88
1	Tally HALL	12.05.85
18	Pat ONSTAD (Can)	13.01.68
DEFENDERS		
32	Bobby BOSWELL	15.03.83
17	Mike CHABALA	24.05.84
4	Ryan COCHRANE	08.08.83
31	Andrew HAINAULT (Can)	17.06.86
2	Eddie ROBINSON	19.06.78
51	Adrian SERIOUX (Can)	12.05.79
16	Craig WAIBEL	21.08.75
MIDFIELDERS		
27	Samuel APPIAH (Gha)	25.03.85
26	Corey ASHE	14.03.86
20	Geoff CAMERON	11.07.85
13	Francisco Navas COBO	17.11.91
5	Danny CRUZ	03.01.90
11	Brad DAVIS	08.11.81
9	Brian MULLAN	23.04.78
8	Richard MULROONEY	03.11.76
22	Lovel PALMER (Jam)	30.08.84
FORWARDS		
25	Brian CHING	24.05.78
7	Luis Angel LANDIN (Mex)	23.07.85
23	Dominic ODURO (Gha)	13.08.85
15	Cam WEAVER	10.06.83
COACH		
	Dominic KINNEAR	26.07.67

KANSAS CITY WIZARDS

GOALKEEPERS		
18	Eric KRONBERG	07.06.83
1	Jimmy NIELSEN (Den)	06.08.77
DEFENDERS		
3	Korede AIYEGBUSI (Eng)	15.07.88
5	Matt BESLER	11.02.87
12	Jimmy CONRAD	12.02.77
6	Pablo ESCOBAR (Col)	12.02.87
2	Michael HARRINGTON	24.01.86
15	Aaron HOHLBEIN	16.08.85
25	Jonathan LEATHERS	05.11.85
7	Chance MYERS	07.12.87
MIDFIELDERS		
22	Davy ARNAUD	22.06.80
8	Stephane AUVRAY (Gdp)	04.09.81
27	Birahim DIOP (Sen)	07.02.79
17	Roger ESPINOZA (Hon)	25.10.86
10	Santiago HIRSIG (Arg)	12.01.78
14	Jack JEWSBURY	13.04.81
21	Igor KOSTOV (Mol)	03.08.87
4	Craig ROCASTLE (Eng)	17.08.81
11	Ryan SMITH (Eng)	10.11.86
28	Graham ZUSI	18.08.86
FORWARDS		
9	Teal BUNBURY (Can)	17.02.90
19	Sunil CHHETRI (Ind)	03.08.84
20	Zoltan HERCEGFALVI (Hun)	31.12.79
23	Kei KAMARA (SLe)	01.09.84
16	Josh WOLFF	25.02.77
COACH		
	Peter VERMES	21.11.66

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SQUADS 2010

LOS ANGELES GALAXY

GOALKEEPERS		
1	Donovan RICKETTS (Jam)	06.07.77
12	Josh SAUNDERS (PR)	02.03.81
DEFENDERS		
88	ALEX (Bra)	30.06.88
16	Gregg BERHALTER	01.08.73
20	A.J. DeLaGARZA	04.11.87
2	Todd DUNIVANT	26.12.80
28	Sean FRANKLIN	21.03.85
4	Omar GONZALEZ	11.10.88
22	LEONARDO (Bra)	05.02.88
5	Yohance MARSHALL (T&T)	22.01.86
MIDFIELDERS		
23	David BECKHAM (Eng)	02.05.75
11	Chris BIRCHALL (T&T)	05.05.84
19	JUNINHO (Bra)	08.01.89
8	Dema KOVALENKO (Ukr)	28.08.77
7	Chris KLEIN	04.01.76
6	Eddie LEWIS	17.05.74
18	Mike MAGEE	02.09.84
84	Clint MATHIS	25.11.76
26	Michael STEPHENS	03.04.89
FORWARDS		
17	Tristan BOWEN	31.01.91
14	Edson BUDDLE	21.05.81
10	Landon DONOVAN	04.03.82
21	Alan GORDON	16.10.81
27	Bryan JORDAN	13.09.85
9	Jovan KIROVSKI	18.03.76
COACH		
	Bruce ARENA	21.09.51

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION

GOALKEEPERS		
24	Preston BURPO	26.09.72
1	Matt REIS	28.03.75
34	Bobby SHUTTLEWORTH	13.05.87
DEFENDERS		
30	Kevin ALSTON	05.05.88
25	Darrius BARNES	24.12.86
12	Cory GIBBS	14.01.80
5	Emmanuel OSEI (Gha)	23.08.82
27	Seth SINOVIC	28.01.87
MIDFIELDERS		
16	Mauricio CASTRO (Hon)	11.01.81
26	Nico COLALUCA	23.05.86
21	Shalrie JOSEPH (Grn)	24.05.78
23	Joseph NIOUKY (Sen)	28.03.86
14	Sainey NYASSI (Gam)	31.01.89
28	Pat PHELAN	16.01.85
8	Chris TIERNEY	09.01.86
19	Michael VIDEIRA	06.01.86
FORWARDS		
33	Zac BOGGS	25.12.86
11	Kheli DUBE (Zim)	18.06.83
10	Edgaras JANKAUSKAS (Lit)	12.03.75
7	Kenny MANSALLY (Gam)	29.01.89
15	Zack SCHILAWSKI	15.04.87
20	Taylor TWELLMAN	29.02.80
COACH		
	Steve NICOL (Sco)	11.12.61

NEW YORK RED BULLS

GOALKEEPERS		
18	Bouna COUNDOUL (Sen)	04.03.82
24	Greg SUTTON (Can)	19.04.77
DEFENDERS		
3	Chris ALBRIGHT	14.01.79
27	Andrew BOYENS (NZ)	18.09.83
2	Kevin GOLDTHWAITE	09.12.82
4	Carlos MENDES	25.12.80
7	Roy MILLER (CR)	24.11.84
12	Mike PETKE	30.01.76
5	Tim REAM	05.10.87
6	Seth STAMMLER	29.09.81
MIDFIELDERS		
11	Danleigh BORMAN (SAf)	25.01.86
13	Austin DA LUZ	09.10.87
99	Irving GARCIA	04.02.88
17	Jeremy HALL	11.09.88
20	Joel LINDPERE (Est)	05.10.81
19	Dane RICHARDS (Jam)	14.12.83
33	Carl ROBINSON (Wal)	13.10.76
23	Tony TCHANI (Cam)	13.04.89
32	Luke SASSANO	14.10.85
8	Sinisa UBIPARIPOVIC (Bos)	25.08.83
FORWARDS		
9	Juan Pablo ANGEL (Col)	24.10.75
25	Conor CHINN	29.08.87
22	Giorgi CHIRGADZE (Geo)	23.11.90
10	Macoumba KANDJI (Sen)	02.08.85
29	Ibrahim SALOU (Gha)	29.05.79
15	John WOLYNIEC	24.01.77
COACH		
	Hans BACKE (Swe)	14.02.52

PHILADELPHIA UNION

GOALKEEPERS		
18	Brad KNIGHTON	06.02.85
24	Brian PERK	21.07.89
1	Chris SEITZ	12.03.87
DEFENDERS		
4	Danny CALIFF	17.03.80
2	Jordan HARVEY	28.01.84
21	David MYRIE (CR)	01.06.88
16	Michael OROZCO	07.02.86
5	Shavar THOMAS (Jam)	29.01.81
MIDFIELDERS		
7	FRED (Bra)	18.08.79
8	Andrew JACOBSON	25.09.85
6	Stefani MIGLIORANZI (Bra)	20.09.77
13	Kyle NAKAZAWA	16.03.88
14	Amobi OKUGO	13.03.91
11	Shea SALINAS	24.06.86
12	Toni STAHL (Fin)	11.05.85
20	Roger TORRES (Col)	13.07.91
23	Nick ZIMMERMAN	03.05.87
FORWARDS		
9	Sebastien LE TOUX (Fra)	10.01.84
19	Jack McINERNEY	05.08.92
15	Alejandro MORENO (Ven)	08.07.79
10	Danny MWANGA (DRC)	17.07.91
COACH		
	Piotr NOWAK (Pol)	05.07.54

REAL SALT LAKE

GOALKEEPERS		
1	Tim MELIA	15.05.86
24	Kyle REYNISH	03.11.83
18	Nick RIMANDO	17.06.79
DEFENDERS		
2	Tony BELTRAN	11.10.87
6	Nat BORCHERS	13.04.81
33	David HORST	25.10.85
30	Rauwshan McKENZIE	19.11.86
4	Jamison OLAVE (Col)	21.04.81
3	Robbie RUSSELL	16.07.79
28	Chris SCHULER	06.09.87
17	Chris WINGERT	16.06.82
MIDFIELDERS		
12	Jean ALEXANDRE (Hai)	24.08.86
5	Kyle BECKERMAN	23.04.82
22	Nelson GONZALEZ (Arg)	22.09.88
21	Luis GIL	14.11.93
20	Ned GRABAVOY	01.07.83
11	Javier MORALES (Arg)	10.01.80
7	Alex NIMO	21.03.90
26	Collen WARNER	24.06.88
FORWARDS		
19	Pablo CAMPOS (Bra)	29.11.83
16	Fabian ESPINDOLA (Arg)	04.05.85
10	Robbie FINDLEY	04.08.85
8	Will JOHNSON (Can)	21.01.87
15	Alvaro SABORIO	25.03.82
77	Andy WILLIAMS (JAM)	23.09.77
COACH		
	Jason KREIS	29.12.72

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

GOALKEEPERS		
1	Joe CANNON	01.01.75
24	Andrew WEBER	09.08.83
DEFENDERS		
2	Bobby BURLING	15.10.84
21	Jason HERNANDEZ	26.08.83
4	Chris LEITCH	01.04.79
15	Justin MORROW	04.10.87
6	Ike OPARA	21.02.89
MIDFIELDERS		
28	ANDRE LUIZ (Bra)	11.01.74
29	Steven BEITASHOUR	01.02.87
11	Bobby CONVEY	27.05.83
12	Ramiro CORRALES	12.03.77
18	Joey GJERTSEN	13.06.82
14	Brandon McDONALD	16.01.86
5	Brad RING	07.04.87
30	Javier ROBLES (Arg)	18.01.85
20	Ramon SANCHEZ (ELS)	25.05.82
FORWARDS		
10	Arturo ALVAREZ (ELS)	28.06.85
25	Quincy AMARIKWA	29.10.87
9	EDUARDO (Bra)	13.10.79
13	Cornell GLEN (T&T)	21.10.80
19	Ryan JOHNSON (Jam)	26.11.84
17	Chris WONDOLOWSKI	28.01.83
COACH		
	Frank YALLOP (Can)	04.04.64

SEATTLE SOUNDERS

GOALKEEPERS		
28	Terry BOSS	01.09.81
18	Kasey KELLER	29.11.69
DEFENDERS		
19	Leo GONZALEZ (CR)	21.11.80
26	Taylor GRAHAM	03.06.80
34	Jhon Kennedy HURTADO (Col)	16.05.84
4	Patrick IANNI	15.06.85
14	Tyrone MARSHALL (Jam)	12.11.74
7	James RILEY	27.10.82
20	Zach SCOTT	02.07.80
5	Tyson WAHL	23.03.84
MIDFIELDERS		
6	Osvaldo ALONSO (Cub)	11.11.85
3	Brad EVANS	20.04.85
15	Stephen KING	06.03.86
24	Roger LEVESQUE	22.01.81
10	Freddie LJUNGBERG (Swe)	16.04.77
23	Sanna NYASSI (Gam)	31.01.89
12	Nathan STURGIS	06.07.87
8	Peter VAGENAS	06.02.78
11	Steve ZAKUANI (DRC)	09.02.88
FORWARDS		
16	David ESTRADA	04.02.88
2	Michael FUCITO	29.03.86
21	Nate JAQUA	28.10.81
17	Fredy MONTERO (Col)	26.01.87
COACH		
	Sigi SCHMID (Ger)	20.03.53

TORONTO

GOALKEEPERS		
18	Brian EDWARDS	06.10.84
24	Stefan FREI (Swi)	20.04.86
DEFENDERS		
3	Nana ATTAKORA (Can)	27.03.89
11	Jim BRENNAN (Can)	08.05.77
27	Gabe GALA (Can)	29.06.89
4	Nick GARCIA	09.04.79
32	Emmanuel GOMEZ (Gam)	20.12.90
20	Ty HARDEN	06.03.84
5	Zac HEROLD	07.06.92
MIDFIELDERS		
2	Sam CRONIN	12.12.86
6	Julian DE GUZMAN (Can)	25.03.81
14	Dwayne DE ROSARIO (Can)	15.05.78
15	Nane JOSEPH (Cam)	03.12.87
22	Amadou SANYANG (Gam)	01.08.91
FORWARDS		
19	Chad BARRETT	30.04.85
9	Ali GERBA (Can)	04.09.81
7	Fuad IBRAHIM	15.08.91
23	Jacob PETERSON	27.01.86
17	O'Brian WHITE (Jam)	14.12.85
COACH		
	PREKI (Ser)	24.06.63

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Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"Everyone refers to Inter as the only Italian club left in the Champions League. Yet the truth is they have nothing to do with Italian football. There wasn't one of our boys in their starting line-up against Chelsea"

Italy coach Marcello Lippi jumps aboard the protectionist bandwagon

Tango Argentino...Esteban Cambiasso (top) and Javier Zanetti celebrate

"With his attributes he'd be the No1 in an individual sport. However, football, if I'm not mistaken, is a collective enterprise"

Former Milan coach Arrigo Sacchi targets Zlatan Ibrahimovic during an interview with a Catalan radio station

"Ketchup! There's ketchup with every meal. I'm surprised the English don't drink it"

Thierry Henry on what he misses least about life in England

Vin ordinaire...Ketchup is not on the Henry diet

"I vomited all night on hearing the news of my sacking. I'm disgusted. I've been sacrificed"

Ivory Coast coach Vahid Halilhodzic takes his dismissal to heart

"Tim Wiese doesn't give up"

Appropriately, Germany's third-choice keeper refers to himself in the third person

Word to the Wiese...Tim has it spot on

"They are plain wrong. They are throwing stones at their own house and destabilising the team"

Koln's Colombian keeper Faryd Mondragon hits out at supporters who have taken to jeering his team-mate, Cameroon full-back Pierre Wome

"Kazan is just like Valencia. But I don't mean the town, the weather or the club"

After recently quitting Russian champions Rubin Kazan for Valencia, Argentinian striker Alejandro Dominguez gets confused

"I don't understand why the fans at the Stade de France stopped backing us after 20 minutes"

France boss Raymond Domenech feigns indignation as the Gallic public yet again turn on *Les Bleus* during the 2-0 friendly defeat by Spain

"He was appointed to the Premier League gig on a starting salary of £177,000 a year (part time), which wasn't so much rewarding failure as buying it a mansion and a performance saloon with a walnut gear knob"

Guardian columnist Marina Hyde is not impressed by Premier League chairman Dave Richards

"Footballers certainly don't earn too much"

Barcelona's Brazilian left-back Maxwell forgets all about Spain's mass unemployment

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SOUTH AFRICA

by Mark Gleeson

In need of some assistance

The locals will be hoping home advantage can help their underperforming heroes

Looking forward...could Katlego Mphela (left) be the answer to South Africa's problems up front?

THE HOST NATION will go into the World Cup as one of the lowest-ranked nations among the 32 finalists and with their ambitions set primarily on avoiding the ignominy of becoming the first hosts not to make it past the first stage.

Carlos Alberto Parreira believes it is possible to reach the knockout phase, but South Africa's coach is not keen on saying it too loudly and prefers to skirt around the issue.

He does, however, suggest that if the home support is loud enough, and his side have the right fitness and focus, the momentum of the event could carry the team beyond the group stage.

In France, Mexico and Uruguay, they have been handed a tough draw, which has only added to the doom and gloom surrounding a team who have long been the subject of derision in their own country, descending the FIFA rankings with alarming speed in recent years.

It is something of an irony that the infrastructure built by South Africa for this World Cup will far exceed expectations, while the team the country was supposed to create in tandem will not.

Perhaps Bafana Bafana have been a little unlucky in being caught in a downward spiral as far as talent is concerned. Their desperate search for a goalscorer means Benni McCarthy keeps being dragged out of the international wilderness to offer a solution, despite his bulging body and mounting injury count.

Parreira had hoped to be able to give his side more exposure over the past four years, but he left the job after 18 months because of his wife's illness and the next 18 months, under Joel Santana, passed without the expected progress. South Africa did have a diet of top teams to play, but the programme backfired as they were consistently beaten and suffered a major loss of morale.

> **A tough draw has only added to the doom and gloom surrounding a team which has long been the subject of derision**

There was some indication of their potential at the Confederations Cup last year, but though South Africa reached the last four they only beat New Zealand and returned an overall tournament record of three losses in five games – even if their semi-final defeat by Brazil only came in the closing stages of the match via a Dani Alves free-kick.

Since his return in November, when Santana was fired, Parreira has worked hard on restoring some confidence and has taken his side on an odyssey of training camps. Whether it makes much difference remains to be seen. ●

For the record

MATCHES SINCE 2009
(all friendlies, except those marked * to donate Confederations Cup games)

27.01.09	South Africa-Zambia	1-0
11.02.09	South Africa-Chile	0-2
28.03.09	South Africa-Norway	2-1
31.03.09	Portugal-South Africa	2-0
06.06.09	South Africa-Poland	1-0
14.06.09	South Africa-Iraq *	0-0
17.06.09	South Africa-New Zealand *	2-0
20.06.09	South Africa-Spain *	0-2
25.06.09	South Africa-Brazil *	0-1
28.06.09	South Africa-Spain *	2-3 aet
12.08.09	South Africa-Serbia	1-3
05.09.09	Germany-South Africa	2-0
08.09.09	Rep of Ireland-South Africa	1-0
19.09.09	South Africa-Madagascar	1-0
10.10.09	Norway-South Africa	1-0
13.10.09	Iceland-South Africa	1-0
14.11.09	South Africa-Japan	0-0
17.11.09	South Africa-Jamaica	0-0
27.01.10	South Africa-Zimbabwe	3-0
03.03.10	South Africa-Namibia	1-1

PLAYERS USED IN MATCHES ABOVE

EIGHTEEN GAMES
Siphiwe TSHABALALA

SEVENTEEN
Siboniso GAXA

SIXTEEN
Teko MODISE, Aaron MOKOENA

FIFTEEN
Kagisho DIKGACOI

FOURTEEN
Bernard PARKER

THIRTEEN
Tsepo MASILELA, Katlego MPHELA

TWELVE
MacBeth SIBAYA

ELEVEN
Itumeleng KHUNE, Steven PIENAAR

TEN
Benson MHLONGO, Elrio VAN HEERDEN

NINE
Mabhuti KHENYEZA, Lucas THWALA

EIGHT
Matthew BOOTH, Morgan GOULD, Richard HENYEKANE, Katlego MASHEGO

SIX
Lance DAVIDS

FIVE
Reneilwe LETSHOLONYANE

FOUR
Rowen FERNANDEZ, Daine KLATE

THREE
Franklin CALE, Thembinkosi FANTENI, Moeneeb JOSEPHS, Bongani KHUMALO, Benni McCARTHY, Surprise MORIRI, Anele NGCONGCA, Siyabonga SANGWENI

TWO
Emile BARON, Bevan FRANSMAN, Thanduyise KHUBONI, Michael MODUBI, Bryce MOON, Nasief MORRIS, Sthembiso NGCOBO, Siyabonga NKOSI, Gert SCHALKWYK, Lefa TSUTSULUPA

ONE
Bradley CARNELL, Andile JALI, Rooi MAHAMUTSA, Calvin MARLIN, Thulasizwe MBUYANE, Innocent MDLEDLE, Lebohang MOKOENA, Lebogang MOTHIBANTWA, Abia NALE, Clifford NGOBENI, Thabo NTHETHE, Tlou SEGOLELA

SCORERS IN MATCHES ABOVE

FIVE GOALS
Katlego MPHELA

THREE
Bernard PARKER

TWO
Siphiwe TSHABALALA

ONE
Thembinkosi FANTENI, Teko MODISE, Thulasizwe MBUYANE, Lucas THWALA

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William HILL 125-1 to win World Cup 2-1 to reach knockout stage

The key men

Experience...Parreira

Carlos Alberto Parreira

Won the World Cup with his native Brazil in 1994, but flopped in Germany four years ago. Has also been to the finals as coach of Kuwait (1982), United Arab Emirates (1990) and Saudi Arabia (1998). He carries an air of conviction and there is a gravitas about his persona, leading South Africa to believe they have got the best man possible for the job.

Top scorer...McCarthy

Benni McCarthy

Often seen as a divisive figure in his homeland, where fans are torn between his ability to score and a lack of commitment to the national cause. Has retired from international football on two previous occasions and has often missed key games with flimsy excuses in the past. However, all of that will be forgotten if he can extend his record tally of 32 goals for Bafana Bafana.

Most caps...Mokoena

Aaron Mokoena

The Portsmouth defensive midfielder plays at centre-back for the national side and is South Africa's most-capped player of all time. Parreira has hinted that he may be tempted to leave him out after a number of mediocre matches, but Mokoena's experience will probably secure him a place in the starting line-up.

Steven Pienaar

Slight of frame but with tremendous vigour and energy, the Everton winger is South Africa's most established international star. His work rate will be key, but even more important will be his ability to create chances for his side.

Teko Modise

Has plenty of creative talent but struggles for consistency, fading when the burden of expectation rests too heavily on his shoulders. Now with Orlando Pirates, he is a late bloomer, having only played regular professional football from the age of 26, but is potentially one of the World Cup's most exciting prospects.

Exciting...Modise

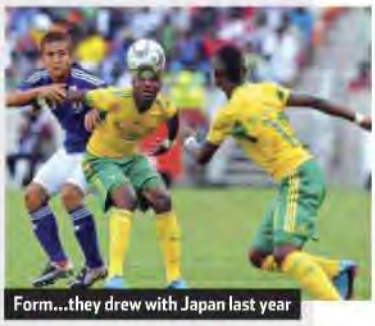
The unanswered questions

How much of a role will the home support play?

Coach Parreira is hoping that the cacophony of sound created by almost 90,000 vuvuzela-blowing fans will terrify opponents. It is expected that the South African fans will get very vocal, even if they have been slow in taking up the opportunity to buy tickets.

Will Benni McCarthy be fully fit?

There are concerns that the striker will not be ready as a knee injury has limited his playing time since he moved from Blackburn Rovers to West Ham United in January.


Form...they drew with Japan last year

Are they really as bad as results seem to suggest?

South Africa are 81st in the world rankings and have won only twice in their last 13 matches, but are they really that bad? Poor results over the past four years might yet prove a smokescreen.

Reasons to be cheerful

Low expectation

Home fans are so used to the national side losing that any success at the World Cup will be vociferously greeted and cheered. This is a team that doesn't have too much pressure on its shoulders.

Backing...home support will be vital

Home environment

There is nowhere like home and this will be a factor. However, it is worth pointing out that South Africa messed up their base-camp arrangements and had to go to Brazil for a month's training.

Altitude

It is folly to underestimate the effects of the altitude in the north of the country, where six venues are at 1,500 metres and above. It is a factor that has often been in Bafana Bafana's favour.

Reasons to be fearful

Stage fright

The enormity of the World Cup and the attendant circus that comes with it will be new to South Africa's players. Missing out on Germany 2006 means few are aware of what it is all about and some are likely to be like rabbits caught in the headlights.

Just not good enough

Bafana Bafana don't have too many international-class players and have been wallowing in mediocrity for years.

A tough opening round group

Two former world champions, in France and Uruguay, and an opening game against Mexico represents a tough draw for hosts who have tried to put on a brave face but were privately horrified by the enormity of the task handed to them.

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SOUTH KOREA

by Michael Church

Great expectations

Having reached the finals more times than any other team on their continent, South Korea represent Asia's best hope in South Africa

Local bragging rights...Kim Dong-jin (5) celebrates South Korea's winner against their neighbours in April

NO MATTER HOW controversial their progress may have been, the success of Guus Hiddink and his South Korea team in reaching the semi-finals of the 2002 World Cup is now etched in the folklore of Asian football.

Eight years ago, the Koreans became the first country from the continent to reach the last four, in the process ending a frustrating run of disappointment that had seen the nation go into the tournament – which they co-hosted with Japan – having never won a game at the World Cup finals.

That record came to an emphatic end, with top nations such as Italy, Portugal and Spain among the scalps the Koreans claimed on home soil. But when it came to replicating those achievements in Germany four years later, without the backing of their fanatical supporters, it was a different matter altogether.

Victory over Togo in their opening game may have given South Korea their first-ever World Cup finals win overseas, but ultimately the outcome was the same as it had been in their previous appearances away from home: they were eliminated in the opening stage.

And that is the millstone that continues to weigh heavily on this team as they prepare to play at an Asian-record eighth World Cup.

Once again, qualification came with few problems as coach Huh Jung-moo led a team in which he has blended the last remaining remnants of the 2002 side with a youthful and vibrant batch of newcomers.

They conceded just three goals in their first round of qualifiers as they saw off Jordan and Turkmenistan to progress to the final phase, along with neighbours North Korea. The pair from the Korean peninsula were then drawn together again in the final round of the continent's qualifying tournament, and once more South Korea were impressive, going through the eight matches of the campaign unbeaten and conceding just four goals.

> **The millstone of never having made it out of the group stage on foreign soil weighs heavily on the team**

Manchester United midfielder Park Ji-sung captained the team throughout qualifying and was his country's top scorer with five goals, but there were others who presented a serious threat.

Ki Sung-yeung has emerged as one of the most talented young players in the Asian game and his ability in both open play and from set-pieces adds another dimension to South Korea's game, while the likes of Lee Chung-yong bring pace and potency to the attack.

The aim this time will be to progress to the second round and Huh will be confident that his team go to South Africa with a realistic chance.

South Korea may be Asia's strongest side historically; now they have to show they are capable of mixing it with more lofty opposition. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
ASIA ROUND 3, GROUP 3

06.02.08	South Korea-Turkmenistan	4-0
26.03.08	North Korea-South Korea	0-0
31.05.08	South Korea-Jordan	2-2
07.06.08	Jordan-South Korea	0-1
14.06.08	Turkmenistan-South Korea	1-3
22.06.08	South Korea-North Korea	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea (Q)	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
North Korea (Q)	6	3	3	0	4	0	12
Jordan	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
Turkmenistan	6	0	1	5	1	12	1

ASIA ROUND 4, GROUP B

10.09.08	North Korea-South Korea	1-1
15.10.08	South Korea-UAE	4-1
19.11.08	Saudi Arabia-South Korea	0-2
11.02.09	Iran-South Korea	1-1
01.04.09	South Korea-North Korea	1-0
06.06.09	UAE-South Korea	0-2
10.06.09	South Korea-Saudi Arabia	0-0
17.06.09	South Korea-Iran	1-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea (Q)	8	4	4	0	12	4	16
North Korea (Q)	8	3	3	2	7	5	12
Saudi Arabia (P)	8	3	3	2	8	8	12
Iran	8	2	5	1	8	7	11
UAE	8	0	1	7	6	17	1

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
TWELVE GAMES
PARK Chu-young (837 mins)
ELEVEN
PARK Ji-sung (984 mins), OH Beom-seok (918 mins)
TEN
CHO Yong-hyung (773 mins), LEE Keun-ho (741 mins), LEE Young-pyo (726 mins), LEE Chung-yong (705 mins), CHO Won-hee (590 mins)
NINE
KANG Min-soo (810 mins), LEE Jung-soo (660 mins)
EIGHT
KI Sung-yeung (695 mins)
SEVEN
JUNG Sung-ryong (630 mins), KIM Nam-il (469 mins), KIM Dong-jin (422 mins)
SIX
LEE Woon-jae (540 mins), KIM Jung-woo (480 mins), KIM Do-heon (427 mins)
FOUR
SEOL Ki-hyeon (307 mins), KIM Chi-woo (283 mins), YEOM Ki-hun (125 mins)
THREE
JEONG Shung-hoon (205 mins), AHN Jung-hwan (156 mins), CHOI Hyo-jin (145 mins)
TWO
KWAK Hee-joo (180 mins), KWAK Tae-hwi (180 mins), CHO Jae-jin (106 mins), KO Ki-gu (94 mins), YANG Dong-hyen (32 mins)
ONE
KIM Hyun-gil (90 mins), KIM Jin-kyu (90 mins), KIM Yong-dae (90 mins), OH Jang-eun (78 mins), CHOI Sung-kuk (60 mins), HWANG Jae-won (53 mins), KIM Hyeung-bum (35 mins), LEE Chun-soo (30 mins), SEO Dong-hyeon (30 mins), LEE Kwan-woo (13 mins), HAN Tae-you (9 mins), BAE Ki-jong (8 mins), CHOI Tae-uk (6 mins), PARK Won-jae (5 mins), SHIN Young-rok (2 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
FIVE GOALS
PARK Ji-sung
FOUR
PARK Chu-young
THREE
KIM Do-heon, LEE Keun-ho
TWO
KI Sung-yeung, KWAK Tae-hwi, SEOL Ki-hyeon
ONE
KIM Chi-woo

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The key men

Big break...Huh

Huh Jung-moo
Finally being given the chance to lead South Korea at a World Cup after missing out in 2002 when he was replaced by Guus Hiddink just 18 months before the finals.

Veteran...Lee Woon-jae

Lee Woon-jae
The veteran goalkeeper, known as "Spiderhands", returns for what will be his fourth World Cup at the age of 37 after first being included in the squad for the USA in 1994. He was not selected in 1998 but was between the posts in both 2002 and 2006.

Park Ji-sung
As the highest-profile player in the squad and the most successful footballer in the history of the Asian game, his experience and energy will be vital as he leads the team by example.

Pin-up...Park Chu-young

Ki Sung-yeung
Joined Celtic in Scotland at the start of the year after impressing for Seoul and the national team. Was named Asia's young player of the year for 2009 and, despite his youth, plays a major role in the centre of South Korea's team.

Park Chu-young
The pin-up boy of South Korean football, he has made a major impression in Europe, scoring regularly for French side Monaco, who he joined in 2008.

Successful...Park Ji-sung

The unanswered questions

Will the defence be able to cope?
While South Korea boast the finest midfield and attack in Asian football, the defence has looked brittle and Huh must find a way to stop conceding cheap goals.

Is there room for Ahn Jung-hwan?
The 34-year-old forward was called up for a friendly against Ivory Coast in March after a reasonable season with Chinese side Dalian Shide, but it remains to be seen whether his inclusion in the squad would add anything of value to South Korea's campaign.

Can they win away?
They have only won once at a World Cup away from home – against Togo in Germany.

Victory...against Togo in 2006

Reasons to be cheerful

Familiarity with the World Cup
This will be South Korea's seventh straight appearance at the World Cup, and their eighth in total, so the day-to-day machinations of the competition will hold little surprise for many of the squad.

Top flight...Bolton's Lee Chung-yong

Plenty of top-level experience
More members of the current set-up have played in the major leagues of Europe than ever before and the squad is sure to benefit from the experience gained by the likes of Park Ji-sung, Park Chu-young and Lee Chung-yong.

Fitness
If there is one area that South Korea always excel it is in their astonishing fitness and ability to play at a high intensity from the first whistle to the last.

Reasons to be fearful

A dithering defence
The shortcomings of the rearguard were seen at the East Asian Championship when China beat them 3-0, with all three goals on the counter-attack. Huh needs to find a solution and fast.

Lack of coaching expertise
Huh Jung-moo has proven himself at Asian level in his two main stints as South Korea coach, taking the team to third place at the 2000 Asian Cup and leading them to this year's World Cup. But his experience against top-level teams remains minimal.

Pressure
Despite a disappointing record at the World Cup, the expectations of supporters is high and any performance that falls short will see those fans turn on their team.

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SPAIN

by Sid Lowe

The team to beat

A remarkable record in the build-up to South Africa makes Spain one of the favourites this summer

Winner...Xabi Alonso (14) celebrates his deciding goal in November's 2-1 friendly win against Argentina

THERE IS ONLY one problem for Spain as they prepare for this summer's World Cup: everything is just too good. So perfect has their progress been, so flawless their form, that it has become almost a concern. Surely, if only by the law of averages, something has to go wrong some time.

Their coach, Vicente Del Bosque, has described being favourites as "a terrible trap" and the fear is that, by believing that this could be their World Cup, Spain are somehow jinxing their chances. Such warped logic suggests that, because it's all gone so right so far, it could all go wrong in South Africa.

But it shouldn't. Spain have been extraordinary over the last three years and there is no sign of them fading just yet. If anything, it looks like Del Bosque's side could get even stronger.

> **Spain have been extraordinary over the last three years and there is no sign of them fading just yet**

They may not win the World Cup – after all, it only takes one inspired day from an opponent or one lapse from them, just one stroke of misfortune and their tournament could be over – but their status among the favourites is indisputable. Rarely has a team presented such a compelling case, proving as beautifully aesthetic as they are brutally effective.

The current European champions have won an astonishing 33 of their last 34 competitive matches and qualification was a breeze. They became the first side to ever reach the World Cup by racking up 10 wins out of 10. As the media attempted to get excited by clashes with Belgium, Bosnia and Turkey, Spain barely seemed to flinch. Even after they had secured qualification they carried on impressing, putting five past Bosnia in their final match.

David Villa just could not stop scoring as Spain found the net 28 times, and conceded just five in the process. The defence was steady and tidy on the ball, and on those rare occasions when Iker Casillas was called upon he responded. It also felt as though the midfield – surely the most technically accomplished around – never gave the ball away, dominating possession game after game.

True, Spain's group was not the strongest, but there have also been friendly victories against Argentina and England. The only time Spain have been beaten since way before the European Championship was in the semi-final of the Confederations Cup by USA. And even that seems to have helped as a timely reminder that the players could not merely expect to win just by turning up.

Everyone else, on the other hand, will expect exactly that to happen. With a record like Spain's, they could hardly do anything else. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
EUROPE GROUP 5

06.09.08	Spain-Bosnia/Herzegovina	1-0
10.09.08	Spain-Armenia	4-0
11.10.08	Estonia-Spain	0-3
15.10.08	Belgium-Spain	1-2
28.03.09	Spain-Turkey	1-0
01.04.09	Turkey-Spain	1-2
05.09.09	Spain-Belgium	5-0
09.09.09	Spain-Estonia	3-0
10.10.09	Armenia-Spain	1-2
14.10.09	Bosnia/Herzegovina-Spain	2-5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain (Q)	10	10	0	0	28	5	30
Bosnia-H'vina (P)	10	6	1	3	25	13	19
Turkey	10	4	3	3	13	10	15
Belgium	10	3	1	6	13	20	10
Estonia	10	2	2	6	9	24	8
Armenia	10	1	1	8	6	22	4

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
NINE GAMES
Joan CAPDEVILA (810 mins), Iker CASILLAS (810 mins), XAVI (774 mins)
EIGHT
Marcos SENNA (630 mins), SERGIO RAMOS (607 mins), XABI ALONSO (535 mins), Santi CAZORLA (452 mins)
SEVEN
David VILLA (555 mins), FERNANDO TORRES (458 mins), Cesc FABREGAS (375 mins)
SIX
Carles PUYOL (540 mins), Gerard PIQUE (481 mins), Raul ALBIOL (458 mins), Andres INIESTA (433 mins)
FIVE
David SILVA (337 mins), Dani GUIZA (104 mins)
FOUR
Albert RIERA (215 mins), Juan MATA (112 mins)
THREE
Carlos MARCHENA (226 mins), Sergio BUSQUETS (196 mins)
TWO
JUANITO (180 mins), Andoni IRAOLA (126 mins), Alvaro NEGREDO (125 mins)
ONE
Nacho MONREAL (90 mins), Pepe REINA (90 mins), Alvaro ARBELOA (82 mins), Diego CAPEL (72 mins), BOJAN Krkic (25 mins), Fernando LLORENTE (2 mins)

GOALSCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
SEVEN GOALS
David VILLA
THREE
Juan MATA, Gerard PIQUE, David SILVA
TWO
Cesc FABREGAS, Alvaro NEGREDO
ONE
Joan CAPDEVILA, Santi CAZORLA, Andres INIESTA, JUANITO, Carles PUYOL, Albert RIERA, Marcos SENNA, XABI ALONSO

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The key men

Vicente Del Bosque
Impossible not to like, he is a great man-manager who has avoided controversy and got on with the job in a quiet, respectful way, carefully adding extra strings to Spain's bow.

Respect...Del Bosque

Gerard Pique
The first line of defence for Barcelona and Spain, he is impeccable in possession, strong in the air and quick across the ground. The perfect addition to a team that already looked pretty good at the 2008 European Championship.

David Villa
May not have the media cheerleaders that fete those players from Barcelona and Real Madrid, but the Valencia striker has scored more La Liga goals than anyone else in the last six years. Was top scorer at Euro 2008 and has an international record of two goals in every three games.

Devastating...Villa

World No1...Casillas

Iker Casillas
Has played more internationals than anyone in Spain's history apart from Andoni Zubizarreta, who he will doubtlessly soon surpass. A respected leader and one of the best goalkeepers in the world.

Heart and soul...Xavi

Xavi
The ball-playing metronome and footballing ideologue who keeps Spain and Barcelona ticking over. When he finally retires, he may well be looked back upon as the best midfielder in his country's history.

The unanswered questions

Are wingers needed?
Spain's neat midfield-possession game means there is no place for out and out wingers, but Del Bosque has tried to give the team that option at key moments – and the signs are that it works too.

Who will be the third man?
It says something about Spain's stability and success, as well as their wealth of talent, when the only debate ahead of the World Cup is over who the third-choice keeper should be. Victor Valdes, Cesar Sanchez, Sergio Asenjo, David De Gea and the rest look set to lose out to Diego Lopez.

Will they play with one or two up front?
Fernando Torres may not have scored during qualification but he continues to be important for Spain. If he's not available though, Del Bosque tends to opt for an extra midfielder, bringing in Cesc Fabregas.

Attacking option...Fabregas (right)

Reasons to be cheerful

Style and substance
Spain and Barcelona are from the same, Johan Cruyff-inspired mould: superb in possession, technically gifted and a joy to behold. Just watch opponents try to get the ball off them.

Jesus Navas
Could be the one surprise package for Spain, having finally joined the squad after overcoming his anxiety problems. Skilful and extremely quick, the 24-year-old winger gives an already superb side another dimension.

Fernando Torres
Liverpool fans might not like it, but the striker's injury problems could be the best thing for Spain as he'll arrive in South Africa reasonably rested and, unlike most of the team, with a point still to prove.

Raring to go...Torres (right)

Reasons to be fearful

Sky-high expectations
Is Del Bosque right when he says being favourites is a terrible trap? Over confidence shouldn't be a problem, but is the pressure going to be too much to handle?

Marcos Senna may not be fit
The Villarreal midfielder was a key player at Euro 2008, but he is getting on a bit now and has struggled with injuries throughout this season. His absence was not felt during qualification, but it could be when it comes to the finals.

Overexposure
You know what you're going to get with Spain, but other sides will have studied Del Bosque's team that little bit more closely this time and will hope to have found a way to stop them.

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SWITZERLAND

by Brian Homewood

All behind them

Qualification was achieved after an embarrassing start to the campaign

Handful...Nkufo (in red) causes problems for Greece

THE DATE September 10, 2008, will probably go down as one of the bleakest in Swiss football. A 2-1 home defeat to a Luxembourg team which included just two professional players had most people waving goodbye to South Africa after only two games of the qualifying competition.

Even in a relatively weak group, there seemed no way of clawing their way back from such a humiliating reverse – especially after they had squandered a 2-0 lead in a 2-2 draw away to Israel in the opener.

Ottmar Hitzfeld's long-held dream of coaching Switzerland had turned to a nightmare and there were calls for him to resign. "Any other coach would have been sacked after a result like this," commented the tabloid *Blick*.

Hopes had not been high in the first place after Switzerland's unhappy performance at Euro 2008, when they co-hosted with Austria and went out in the first round. But nobody expected anything like this.

Hitzfeld, however, was determined to rebuild, saying: "It's one of the hardest setbacks I have ever had to take, but I am used to dealing with defeats and you have to make sure that they make you harder and stronger. Now is the time for the team to pull together and mobilise even more strength."

Few held out much hope but, after that shock to the system, the team followed the national stereotype for precision and exactness to perfection as they won the next five games, scoring twice in each.

The first was a somewhat stuttering affair at home to Latvia, when they needed a 73rd-minute winner from Blaise Nkufo to take the points.

That was followed by the real turning point, a 2-1 win in Greece with Nkufo again scoring the winner. Two-nil wins away and at home to Moldova followed before another meeting with the Greeks, in which Stephane Grichting and Marco Padalino struck in the last 10 minutes to give them a somewhat fortuitous 2-0 win against 10-man opponents.

Switzerland's run was broken in Latvia with a 2-2 draw, when Eren Derdiyok salvaged a late point. But a point in a nervy match with Israel in Basel was enough to send them to South Africa.

> **Hitzfeld, who is a qualified teacher, is predictably studious and demands tactical discipline from his players**

Hitzfeld, who is a qualified maths and PE teacher, is predictably studious and demands tactical discipline from his players. This is especially true of the midfield, where battlers such as Benjamin Huggel rule the roost.

The coach has stuck rigidly to the same 4-4-2 formation throughout the campaign and perhaps his biggest coup was to bring striker Nkufo – who is Twente's all-time leading scorer in Holland – out of his self-imposed international exile.

The Swiss did not actually lose a game at the World Cup in 2006, nor did they concede a goal. They won two games 2-0 and drew the others 0-0, losing to Ukraine on penalties in the second round.

However, in one of the most deceptively difficult groups in the tournament, they will need to find some inspiration and flair if they are going to reach their first quarter-finals since 1954. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
EUROPE GROUP 2

06.09.08	Israel-Switzerland	2-2
10.09.08	Switzerland-Luxembourg	1-2
11.10.08	Switzerland-Latvia	2-1
15.10.08	Greece-Switzerland	1-2
28.03.09	Moldova-Switzerland	0-2
01.04.09	Switzerland-Moldova	2-0
05.09.09	Switzerland-Greece	2-0
09.09.09	Latvia-Switzerland	2-2
10.10.09	Luxembourg-Switzerland	0-3
14.10.09	Switzerland-Israel	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland (Q)	10	6	3	1	18	8	21
Greece (P)	10	6	2	2	20	10	20
Latvia	10	5	2	3	18	15	17
Israel	10	4	4	2	20	10	16
Luxembourg	10	1	2	7	4	25	5
Moldova	10	0	3	7	6	18	3

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
TEN GAMES
Blaise NKUFO (869 mins), Tranquillo BARNETTA (795 mins)
NINE
Diego BENAGLIO (810 mins), Stephane GRICHTING (810 mins), Alexander FREI (663 mins)
EIGHT
Gokhan INLER (720 mins), Stephan LICHTSTEINER (720 mins), Benjamin HUGGEL (701 mins)
SEVEN
Hakan YAKIN (228 mins), Eren DERDIYOK (157 mins)
SIX
Christoph SPYCHER (452 mins), Gelson FERNANDES (310 mins)
FIVE
Ludovic MAGNIN (450 mins), Marco PADALINO (422 mins), Johan VONLANTHEN (124 mins)
FOUR
Philippe SENDEROS (360 mins), Johan DJOUROU (227 mins)
THREE
Steve VON BERGEN (270 mins), Valon BEHRAMI (268 mins), Almen ABDI (44 mins)
TWO
Mario EGGIMANN (134 mins), Alain NEF (134 mins)
ONE
Valentin STOCKER (90 mins), Marco WOLFLI (90 mins), Mauro LUSTRINELLI (25 mins), Blerim DZEMAILI (19 mins), Reto ZIEGLER (8 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
FIVE GOALS
Alexander FREI, Blaise NKUFO
TWO
Philippe SENDEROS
ONE
Eren DERDIYOK, Gelson FERNANDES, Stephane GRICHTING, Benjamin HUGGEL, Marco PADALINO, Hakan YAKIN

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William HILL 6-4 to get through group 11-1 to go out in the quarter-finals

The key men

Ambition...Hitzfeld

Ottmar Hitzfeld
One of the world's most successful coaches, he won seven Bundesliga titles plus the European Cup with Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich. Born near the Swiss border, his ambition has always been to coach the Alpine nation, something which finally materialised following the last European Championship.

Bad luck...Frei

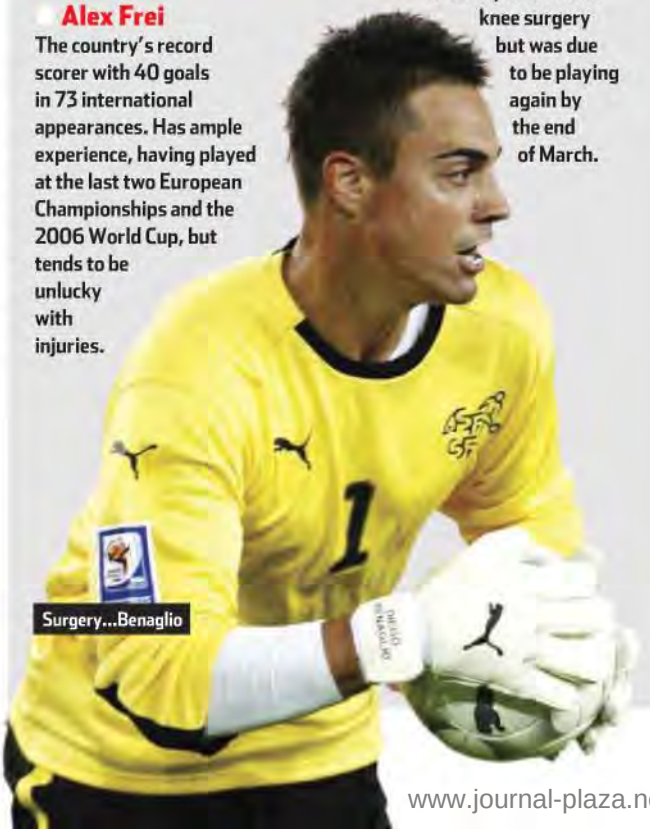
Alex Frei
The country's record scorer with 40 goals in 73 international appearances. Has ample experience, having played at the last two European Championships and the 2006 World Cup, but tends to be unlucky with injuries.

Blaise Nkufo
Born in Congo DR, he returned to the Switzerland team after four years of self-exile and was the national side's top scorer in qualifying.

Ever present...Barnetta

Tranquillo Barnetta
Attacking midfielder or winger who was ever present in qualifying and has been a key player in Bayer Leverkusen's success in the Bundesliga this season. One of Switzerland's top players in 2006, he also played in the team that won the European Under-17 Championship in 2002.

Diego Benaglio
Third-coach goalkeeper in 2006, he has become the regular since Hitzfeld took over and helped Wolfsburg win the Bundesliga last season. Recently underwent knee surgery but was due to be playing again by the end of March.


Surgery...Benaglio

The unanswered questions

Will Alex Frei be fit?
After suffering a broken arm in a Swiss league game against Aarau in late February, the Basel striker was expected to be out of action for around 10 weeks. Adding in the time needed to regain match fitness, that's cutting it pretty fine.

Hurt...Frei

How will they fare against Chile and Honduras?
Switzerland lost 3-0 to Uruguay in March in a World Cup warm-up and will meet Costa Rica in June, but they have little recent experience against Latin sides. Their last competitive international against a side from Latin America was at the 1994 World Cup when they lost 2-0 to Colombia.

Reasons to be cheerful

Swiss consistency
After the uncharacteristic slip-up against Luxembourg, Switzerland were a model of consistency as they won their next five qualifiers. In the 2006 World Cup, they won two matches 2-0 and drew two games 0-0, going out to Ukraine on penalties without losing a game.

Nothing to lose
Skiers and ice hockey players are under the most pressure to do well in Switzerland, while football plays second fiddle to these sports and simply qualifying for the World Cup is seen as success.

Harmonious atmosphere and no egos
The Swiss are an unpretentious lot and the same goes for their players. All are highly articulate, speak several languages and the label "model professional" can be attached to nearly every one. The atmosphere in the squad is excellent.

Reasons to be fearful

Lack of flair
There are no truly outstanding individuals in the set-up and Hitzfeld is not known for fielding adventurous line-ups.

Shocker...losing to Luxembourg

Relatively easy qualifying group
Greece, Israel, Latvia, Luxembourg and Moldova did not provide the most demanding qualifying group. Even so, Switzerland made heavy weather of some games, losing a 2-0 lead in Israel, nearly coming a cropper in Latvia and, of course, going down at home to Luxembourg.

Journey into the unknown
Apart from a recent foray to the United States and a couple of trips to the Middle East and Hong Kong, Switzerland have barely ventured outside Europe in the last 20 years. South Africa will be a completely new environment for them.

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URUGUAY

by Rex Gowar

Hit and miss

Oscar Tabarez needs to get his unpredictable side to make the most of their undoubted talents

Clear head...Sebastian Abreu (13), who scored Uruguay's goal at home to Costa Rica, defends a corner in the play-off game

A GREAT TEAM in the first half of the 20th century, Uruguay have made a habit of getting to the World Cup play-offs in the 21st – and they now go to South Africa looking to get past the first round for the first time since 1990. However, their progress this summer is likely to be exactly the same as their qualification for the finals was: totally unpredictable.

Uruguay have players who, on their day, can beat almost anyone – but they can also flatter to deceive. Oscar Tabarez's side won just three of their opening 10 games in qualifying – a run which left them in fifth place at the end of 2008.

They began 2009 beating Paraguay 2-0 and drawing 0-0 away to Chile before facing Brazil in Montevideo in June. Although they had far more of the game, Uruguay still ended up losing 4-0 and a first home defeat by Brazil for more than 30 years rocked the team's confidence so much that they lost 1-0 away to bottom of the group Peru.

With their fate looking sealed as non-qualifiers, Uruguay dropped to seventh place before reviving their chances with good wins at home to Colombia and away to Ecuador in Quito, where Diego Forlan converted a stoppage-time penalty to lift his side back up to fifth.

> **Uruguay have players who, on their day, can beat almost anyone – but they can also flatter to deceive**

Losing their last match at home to a defensively minded Argentina was no disgrace, even if the Uruguayan media had talked up their chances of victory.

Diego Lugano then played a captain's role by leading from the front and scoring the crucial away goal in the play-off against Costa Rica. Playing at home in Montevideo always seemed the harder task for Tabarez's team and, sure enough, the draw against the Costa Ricans was a laboured point – albeit one which sent Uruguay back to the World Cup finals after missing out in 2006.

The last time Uruguay progressed beyond the group stage of the finals was in Italy in 1990, the first time Tabarez was in charge. In South Africa, his goal will be to get Uruguay's best finish since the 1970 semi-finals in Mexico. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
SOUTH AMERICA GROUP

13.10.07	Uruguay-Bolivia	5-0
17.10.07	Paraguay-Uruguay	1-0
18.11.07	Uruguay-Chile	2-2
21.11.07	Brazil-Uruguay	2-1
14.06.08	Uruguay-Venezuela	1-1
17.06.08	Uruguay-Peru	6-0
06.09.08	Colombia-Uruguay	0-1
10.09.08	Uruguay-Ecuador	0-0
11.10.08	Argentina-Uruguay	2-1
14.10.08	Bolivia-Uruguay	2-2
28.03.09	Uruguay-Paraguay	2-0
01.04.09	Chile-Uruguay	0-0
06.06.09	Uruguay-Brazil	0-4
10.06.09	Venezuela-Uruguay	2-2
05.09.09	Peru-Uruguay	1-0
09.09.09	Uruguay-Colombia	3-1
10.10.09	Ecuador-Uruguay	1-2
14.10.09	Uruguay-Argentina	0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (Q)	18	9	7	2	33	11	34
Chile (Q)	18	10	3	5	32	22	33
Paraguay (Q)	18	10	3	5	24	16	33
Argentina (Q)	18	8	4	6	23	20	28
Uruguay (P)	18	6	6	6	28	20	24
Ecuador	18	6	5	7	22	26	23
Colombia	18	6	5	7	14	18	23
Venezuela	18	6	4	8	23	29	22
Bolivia	18	4	3	11	22	36	15
Peru	18	3	4	11	11	34	13

CONCACAF/SOUTH AMERICA PLAY-OFF

14.11.09	Costa Rica-Uruguay	0-1
18.11.09	Uruguay-Costa Rica	1-1

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
NINETEEN GAMES Luis SUAREZ (1,749 mins)
SEVENTEEN Diego LUGANO (1,530 mins)
SIXTEEN Diego GODIN (1,430 mins), Sebastian ABREU (695 mins)
FIFTEEN Diego FORLAN (1,288 mins), Maxi PEREIRA (1,169 mins), Cristian RODRIGUEZ (1,154 mins)
FOURTEEN Diego PEREZ (1,062 mins)
TWELVE Martin CACERES (1,063 mins), Sebastian EGUREN (827 mins)
ELEVEN Walter GARGANO (927 mins)
TEN Alvaro PEREIRA (856 mins)
NINE Jorge FUCILE (684 mins), Andres SCOTTI (641 mins)
EIGHT Juan CASTILLO (720 mins), Carlos BUENO (318 mins)
SEVEN Bruno SILVA (464 mins), Vicente SANCHEZ (274 mins), Edinson CAVANI (166 mins)
SIX Alvaro FERNANDEZ (246 mins)
FIVE Fabian CARINI (450 mins), Ignacio GONZALEZ (330 mins), Alvaro GONZALEZ (267 mins)
FOU R Fernando MUSLERA (360 mins), Jorge RODRIGUEZ (157 mins)
THREE Sebastian VIERA (270 mins), Jorge MARTINEZ (188 mins)
TWO Pablo GARCIA (180 mins), Nicolas LODEIRO (145 mins), Carlos VALDEZ (120 mins), Mauricio VICTORINO (108 mins)
ONE Miguel AMADO (90 mins), Diego ARISMENDI (90 mins), Egidio AREVALO (44 mins), Mario REGUEIRO (25 mins), Javier CHEVANTON (17 mins), Sebastian FERNANDEZ (9 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
SEVEN GOALS Diego FORLAN
SIX Sebastian ABREU
FIVE Luis SUAREZ
FOUR Carlos BUENO, Diego LUGANO
TWO Sebastian EGUREN
ONE Vicente SANCHEZ, Andres SCOTTI

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The key men

Back as boss...Tabarez

Oscar Tabarez
In charge of Uruguay again – 20 years after steering them to the second round of Italia 90 – he says of this summer's group: "Mexico is a big game. France are a very difficult team, but not impossible to beat. This group is wide open – any of the four teams have the chance to go through."

Second chance...Forlan

Diego Forlan
Will be going to his second World Cup hoping for a better outcome than Korea/Japan in 2002 when Uruguay collected just two points. He saw no action in the first two games, but came on for the second half against Senegal and scored in a 3-3 draw.

Diego Perez
Gives the Uruguay defence cover across midfield with his high work rate and tough tackling. Will occasionally launch attacks too.

Playmaker...Lodeiro

Nicolas Lodeiro
Made his international debut in the play-offs against Costa Rica as the playmaker the national team lacked. Ajax recognised his talent and snapped him up from Nacional in January.

Diego Lugano
A rugged defender who is steady on the ground and tough in the air. First showed his leadership qualities on the big stage when captaining Sao Paulo of Brazil to the Libertadores and world club titles in 2005.

Rugged...Lugano

The unanswered questions

Who is their best goalkeeper?
In the team's 20 qualifiers, Fabian Carini played in the first five games, Juan Castillo in the next five and then three more after Sebastian Viera had played in three. Then Fernando Muslera played in the last four – including the two play-off games.

Is there a place for another striker?
Tabarez could be tempted to include one of the prolific Argentina-based strikers – Santiago Silva, Rodrigo Lopez or Joaquin Boghossian – who were all overlooked in the qualifiers.

Latest choice...Muslera

Does Tabarez know his strongest line-up?
The jury is still out on whether the side has a better balance when playing with one or two holding midfielders.

Reasons to be cheerful

Play-off victory
Just getting to South Africa was a victory in itself and one which takes the pressure off the team.

Nicolas Lodeiro
The 21-year-old looks capable of giving Uruguay the creativity they have often lacked in midfield.

The conditions
The winter climate in South Africa is similar to that in Uruguay.

Reasons to be fearful

Their draw
Being placed with the host nation and the 2006 runners-up, plus tough opposition in Mexico, does not make it the easiest of groups.

Lack of cover
There is not enough depth in certain areas of the side, particularly the creative midfield role.

Temperament
In the past, Uruguay have tended to react badly when the chips are down.

Volatile...tempers flare against Peru

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USA

by Paul Gardner

Germany and beyond

American expectations in South Africa this summer don't just stop at a place in the last 16

Way to go...Dempsey hitches a lift from Donovan after the latter scores against Brazil in the Confederations Cup

WITH SECOND SPOT in Group C a realistic possibility, the USA could find themselves facing Germany (as winners of Group D) in the last 16 in Bloemfontein on June 27. Yet while many would see that as the end of their participation in South Africa, there are those who believe Bob Bradley's side could go further and reach the quarter-finals like they did eight years ago.

In 2002, the USA scared the heck out of Germany in the last eight and might even have gone on to win the game had they been awarded a penalty for Torsten Frings' handball on the goal line.

That performance, together with their more recent showing at last year's Confederations Cup – when they knocked out Spain and came close to upsetting Brazil – is proof of the team's potential. However, between those performances we have also seen a more banal version of the USA; the one that turned up at the 2006 World Cup and didn't get beyond the first phase, and for which coach Bruce Arena paid the price.

His replacement Bradley – a cautious man, not given to much in the way of either talk or humour – has spent four years building a solid, if unspectacular, side which topped the CONCACAF group this time round, though, realistically, that is not much of a test as the three allocated berths pretty well ensure that the USA will qualify comfortably for all future World Cups.

During his four years in charge, Bradley has used 90 players, but despite all the experimentation he always returns to his old faithfuls for the big games. To a nucleus of goalkeeper Tim Howard, defenders Carlos Bocanegra, Jay DeMerit and Heath Pearce, midfielders Landon Donovan, Clint Dempsey and Michael Bradley, and forward Jozy Altidore, you can add defender Oguchi Onyewu if he is over his long-term injury problems.

> **Despite all the experimentation, Bradley always returns to his old faithfuls for the big games**

The image of the exuberant USA seen at the Confederations Cup is also somewhat deceiving. Closer to reality is a more straightforward team built on the standard convention of a well-organised defence. But that should not be taken to mean that this is primarily a counter-attacking team.

While this may be the case when facing stronger teams, the USA should be capable of sustaining a more forward-thinking game against Algeria and Slovenia. That puts Donovan centre stage – and his form is key if they are to reach the quarter-finals. ●

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
CONCACAF ROUND 2

15.06.08	USA-Barbados	8-0
22.06.08	Barbados-USA	0-1

CONCACAF ROUND 3, GROUP 1

20.08.08	Guatemala-USA	0-1
06.09.08	Cuba-USA	0-1
10.09.08	USA-Trinidad & Tobago	3-0
11.10.08	USA-Cuba	6-1
15.10.08	Trinidad & Tobago-USA	2-1
19.11.08	USA-Guatemala	2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USA (Q)	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
T&T (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Guatemala	6	1	2	3	6	7	5
Cuba	6	1	0	5	5	18	3

CONCACAF ROUND 4

11.02.09	USA-Mexico	2-0
28.03.09	El Salvador-USA	2-2
01.04.09	USA-Trinidad & Tobago	3-0
03.06.09	Costa Rica-USA	3-1
06.06.09	USA-Honduras	2-1
12.08.09	Mexico-USA	2-1
05.09.09	USA-El Salvador	2-1
09.09.09	Trinidad & Tobago-USA	0-1
10.10.09	Honduras-USA	2-3
14.10.09	USA-Costa Rica	2-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USA (Q)	10	6	2	2	19	13	20
Mexico (Q)	10	6	1	3	18	12	19
Honduras (Q)	10	5	1	4	17	11	16
Costa Rica (P)	10	5	1	4	15	15	16
El Salvador	10	2	2	6	9	15	8
T&T	10	1	3	6	10	22	6

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS
FIFTEEN GAMES
Landon DONOVAN (1,340 mins), Carlos BOCANEGRA (1,331 mins), Michael BRADLEY (1,326 mins)
THIRTEEN Tim HOWARD (1,170 mins), Oguchi ONYEWU (1,170 mins), Clint DEMPSEY (1,072 mins), Jozy ALTIDORE (755 mins)
TWELVE DaMarcus BEASLEY (928 mins)
ELEVEN Brian CHING (747 mins)
TEN Sacha KLJESTAN (661 mins)
NINE Heath PEARCE (756 mins)
SEVEN Steve CHERUNDOLO (511 mins), Ricardo CLARK (444 mins), Jose Francisco TORRES (210 mins)
SIX Jonathan BORNSTEIN (540 mins), Frankie HEJDUK (474 mins), Pablo MASTROENI (392 mins), Freddy ADU (343 mins), Charlie DAVIES (334 mins), Benny FEILHABER (253 mins)
FIVE Brad GUZAN (450 mins), Stuart HOLDEN (217 mins)
FOUR Jonathan SPECTOR (360 mins), Conor CASEY (250 mins), Maurice EDU (193 mins), Eddie LEWIS (187 mins)
THREE Danny CALIFF (270 mins), Jay DeMERIT (199 mins)
TWO John THORRINGTON (102 mins), Kenny COOPER (87 mins), Danny SZETELA (73 mins), Eddie JOHNSON (33 mins), Chris ROLFE (27 mins)
ONE Clarence GOODSON (90 mins), Chad MARSHALL (90 mins), Drew MOOR (90 mins), Michael OROZCO (90 mins), Michael PARKHURST (90 mins), Marvell WYNNE (90 mins), Robbie ROGERS (22 mins), Kyle BECKERMAN (11 mins), Davy ARNAUD (7 mins), Chad BARRETT (5 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
SIX GOALS Jozy ALTIDORE
FIVE Michael BRADLEY, Clint DEMPSEY, Landon DONOVAN
FOUR Brian CHING
TWO DaMarcus BEASLEY, Carlos BOCANEGRA, Conor CASEY, Charlie DAVIES
ONE Freddy ADU, Jonathan BORNSTEIN, Ricardo CLARK, Kenny COOPER, Frankie HEJDUK, Eddie JOHNSON, Eddie LEWIS, Oguchi ONYEWU (plus one own goal)

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9/1	Argentina	50/1	Paraguay	125/1	Australia	250/1	Slovakia
12/1	Italy	66/1	Ghana	125/1	Denmark	250/1	Slovenia
14/1	Germany	66/1	Serbia	125/1	South Africa	750/1	Honduras
14/1	Netherlands	80/1	Cameroon	150/1	Greece	2000/1	North Korea
16/1	France	80/1	Mexico	200/1	Japan	2000/1	New Zealand

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STAGE OF ELIMINATION

SPAIN		ARGENTINA		GERMANY		FRANCE	
13/2	Group Stage	5/1	Group Stage	3/1	Group Stage	7/2	Group Stage
11/5	Second Phase	9/4	Second Phase	9/4	Second Phase	2/1	Second Phase
10/3	Quarter Final	9/4	Quarter Final	5/2	Quarter Final	9/4	Quarter Final
11/2	Semi Final	9/2	Semi Final	5/1	Semi Final	5/1	Semi Final
5/1	Runner Up	8/1	Runner Up	10/1	Runner Up	11/1	Runner Up
9/2	Winner	9/1	Winner	12/1	Winner	14/1	Winner

GROUP BETTING

GROUP A		GROUP B		GROUP C		GROUP D	
5/6	France	4/9	Argentina	3/10	England	4/5	Germany
19/5	Mexico	4/1	Nigeria	9/2	USA	7/2	Serbia
19/5	Uruguay	8/1	Greece	10/1	Slovenia	4/1	Ghana
6/1	S. Africa	9/1	S. Korea	16/1	Algeria	7/1	Australia

GROUP E		GROUP F		GROUP G		GROUP H	
4/6	Netherlands	4/9	Italy	4/7	Brazil	1/4	Spain
7/2	Cameroon	13/5	Paraguay	10/3	Portugal	5/1	Chile
9/2	Denmark	8/1	Slovakia	7/2	Ivory Coast	17/2	Switzerland
9/1	Japan	40/1	N. Zealand	80/1	North Korea	28/1	Honduras

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The key men

Bob Bradley
Don't expect the spectacular. Always likes to play with a four-man back line, plus two defensive midfielders, but he does allow plenty of freedom to creative players such as Donovan and Dempsey.

Rigid...Bradley

Athletic...Howard

Michael Bradley
The coach's son plays a vital all-action linking role between defence and attack, and is also a goalscoring threat.

Landon Donovan
Invariably the creative spark, he brings not only quickness of action and a sharp football brain, but goals too – he is the USA's all-time leading scorer.

Tim Howard
The latest in a long line of strong, athletic American goalkeepers, with four years of experience as a starter for Everton in the Premier League.

Link role...Bradley jnr

Jozy Altidore
Offers a physical presence, combined with speed and excellent ball control. He is a good finisher but could be handicapped by a lack of first-team action at Hull City.

Physical...Altidore

The unanswered questions

Where are the full-backs?
Jonathan Spector, Marvell Wynne, Jonathan Bornstein, Steve Cherundolo, Heath Pearce and veteran Frankie Hejduk offer plenty of options at full-back, but none has been consistently convincing at international level.

Who will play up front alongside Jozy Altidore?
If Charlie Davies – who was Altidore's strike partner during the Confederations Cup campaign – fails to recover in time from his car accident, there is no obvious replacement.

How strong is the bench?
For most positions – other than goalkeeper – the drop-off in quality when a substitute comes on is quite noticeable.

Quick feet...but will Davies (left) be fit?

Reasons to be cheerful

European experience
The majority of the team have plenty of experience playing for European teams – which is a big plus, even though few of them play for top teams.

The draw
Both Algeria and Slovenia are viewed as beatable in Group C, in which case a loss to England in the opening group would not stop the USA advancing.

Past form
The squad's confidence has been greatly boosted by their performance at the Confederations Cup last year.

Clearing job...Onyewu against Spain

Reasons to be fearful

Central defence
There is no adequate replacement if Oguchi Onyewu fails to recover fully from his long-term injury.

Pressure on Donovan
There is danger of an overreliance on Landon Donovan as the spark plug for attacking.

Poor discipline
Two red cards in the crucial loss to Ghana cost the USA severely at the World Cup in 2006. The overly physical approach of the defence is worrying, while midfielder Michael Bradley is prone to yellow-card suspensions.

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